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ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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THE DAY WILL COME.

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CHAPTER I.

"Farewell, too—now at last—
Farewell, fair lily."

THE joy-bells clashed out upon the clear, bright air, startling the rooks in the elm-trees that showed their leafy tops above the grey gables of the old church. The bells broke out with sudden jubilation; sudden, albeit the village had been on the alert for that very sound all the summer afternoon, uncertain as to when the signal for that joy peal might be given.

The signal had come now, given by the telegraph wires to the old postmistress, and sent on to the expectant ringers in the church tower. The young couple had arrived at Wareham station, five miles off; and four horses were bringing them to their

honeymoon home yonder amidst the old woods of Cheriton Chase.

Cheriton village had been on tiptoe with expectancy ever since four o'clock, although common sense ought to have informed the villagers that a bride and bridegroom who were to be married at two o'clock in Westminster Abbey were not very likely to appear at Cheriton early in the afternoon. But the village having made up its mind to a half holiday was glad to begin early. A little knot of gipsies from the last race meeting in the neighbourhood had improved the occasion and set up the friendly and familiar image of Aunt Sally on the green in front of the Eagle Inn; while a rival establishment had started a pictorial shooting gallery, with a rubicund giant's face and wide-open mouth, grinning at the populace across a barrel of Barcelona nuts. There are some people who might think Cheriton village and Cheriton Chase too remote from the busy world and its traffic to be subject to strong emotions of any kind. Yet even in this region of Purbeck, cut off from the rest of England by a winding river, and ostentatiously calling itself an island, there were eager interests and

warm feelings, and many a link with the great world of men and women on the other side of the stream.

Cheriton Chase was one of the finest places in the county of Dorset. It lay south of Wareham, between Corfe Castle and Branksea Island, and in the midst of scenery which has a peculiar charm of its own, a curious blending of level pasture and steep hillside, barren heath and fertile water-meadow; here a Dutch landscape, grazing cattle, and winding stream; there a suggestion of some lonely Scottish deer walk; an endless variety of outline; and yonder on the steep hilltop the grim stone walls and mouldering bastions of Corfe Castle, standing dark and stern against the blue fair-weather sky or boldly confronting the force of the tempest.

Cheriton House was almost as old as Corfe in the estimation of some of the country people. Its history went back into the night of ages. But while the Castle had suffered siege and battery by Cromwell's ruthless cannon, and had been left to stand as that arch destroyer left it, until only the outer walls of the mighty fabric remained, with a tower or two, and the mullions of one great window standing up above

the rest, the mere skeleton of the gigantic pile, Cheriton House had been cared for and added to century after century, so that it presented now a picturesque blending of old and new, in which almost every corridor and every room was a surprise to the stranger.

Never had Cheriton been better cared for than by its present owner, nor had Cheriton village owned a more beneficent lord of the manor. And yet Lord Cheriton was an alien and a stranger to the soil, and that kind of person whom rustics mostly are inclined to look down upon—a self-made man.

The present master of Cheriton was a man who owed wealth and distinction to his own talents. He had been raised to the peerage about fifteen years before this day of clashing joy-bells and village rejoicings. He had been owner of the Cheriton estate for more than twenty years, having bought the property on the death of the last squire, and at a time of unusual depression. He was popularly supposed to have got the estate for an old song; but the old song meant something between seventy and eighty thousand pounds, and represented the bulk of his

wife's fortune. He had not been afraid so to swamp his wife's dowry, for he was at this time one of the most popular silk gowns at the equity Bar. He was making four or five thousand a year, and he was strong in the belief in his power to rise higher.

The purchase, prompted by ambition, and a desire to take his place among the landed gentry, had turned out a very lucky one from a financial point of view, for a stone quarry that had been unworked for more than a century was speedily developed by the new owner of the soil, and became a source of income which enabled him to improve mansion-house and farms without embarrassment.

Under Mr. Dalbrook's improving hand the Cheriton estate, which had been gradually sinking to decay in the occupation of an exhausted race, became as perfect as human ingenuity, combined with judicious outlay, can make any estate. The falcon eye of the master was on all things. The famous advocate's only idea of a holiday was to work his hardest in the supervision of his Dorsetshire property. He thought of Cheriton many a time in the law courts, as Fox used to think of St. Anne's and

his turnips amidst the debauchery of a long night's card-playing, or in the whirl of a stormy debate. Purbeck might have been the motto and password of his life. He was born at Dorchester, the son of humble shopkeeping parents, and was educated at the quaint old stone grammar school in that good old town. All his happiest hours of boyhood had been spent in the Isle of Purbeck. Those watery meadows and breezy commons and break-neck hills had been his playground; and when he went back to them as a hard-headed, over-worked man of the world, made arrogant from the magnitude of a success which had never known check or retrogression, the fountains of his heart were unlocked by the very atmosphere of that fertile land where the salt breath of the sea came tempered by the balmy perfume of the heather, the odour of hedgerow flowers, rosemary, and thyme.

At Cheriton James Dalbrook unbent, forgot that he was a great man, and remembered only that his lot was cast in a pleasant place, and that he had the most lovable of wives and the loveliest of daughters.

His daughter had been born at Cheriton, had known no other country home, and had never considered the first-floor flat in Victoria Street where her father and mother spent the London season, and where her father had his *pied à terre* all the year round, in the light of a home. His daughter, Juanita, was the eldest of three children born in the old manor house. The two younger, both sons, died in infancy; and it seemed to James Dalbrook that there was a blight upon his offspring, such a blight as that which withered the male children of Henry of England and Catherine of Arragon. Much had been given to him. He had been allowed to make name and fortune, he whose sole heritage was a little crockery shop in a second-rate street of Dorchester. He had enjoyed the lordship of broad acres, the honours and position of a rural squire; but he was not to be allowed that crowning glory for which strong men yearn. He was not to be the first of a long line of Barons Cheriton of Cheriton.

After the grief and disappointment of those two deaths—first of an infant of a few weeks old, and

afterwards of a lovely child of two years—James Dalbrook hardened his heart for a little while against the fair young sister who survived them. She could not perpetuate that barony which was the crown of his greatness; or if by special grace her father's title might be in after days bestowed upon the husband of her choice—which in the event of her marrying judiciously and marrying wealth, might not be impracticable—it would be an alien to his race who would bear the title which he, James Dalbrook, had created. He had so longed for a son, and behold two had been given to him, and upon both the blight had fallen. When people praised his daughter's childish loveliness he shook his head despondently, thinking that she too would be taken, like her brothers, before ever the bud became a flower.

His heart sickened at thought of this contingency, and of his heir-at-law in the event of his dying childless, a first cousin, clerk in an auctioneer's office at Weymouth, a sandy-haired freckled youth, without an aspirate, with a fixed idea that he was an authority upon dress, style, and billiards, an insup-

portable young man under any conditions, but hateful to murderousness as one's next heir. To think of that freckled snob strutting about the estate in years to come, blinking with his white eyelashes at those things which had been so dear to the dead.

His wife, to whom he owed the estate, had no relations nearer or dearer to her than the freckled auctioneer was to her husband. There remained for them both to work out their plans for the disposal of that estate and fortune which was their own to deal with as they pleased. Already James Dalbrook had dim notions of a Dalbrook Scholarship Fund, in which future barristers should have their long years of waiting upon fortune made easier to them, and for which they should bless the memory of the famous advocate.

Happily those brooding fears were not realized; this time the bud was not blighted, the flower carried no canker in its heart, but opened its petals to the morning of life, a strong bright blossom, revelling in sun and shower, wind and spray. Juanita grew from babyhood to girlhood with hardly an illness, save the regulation childish complaints, which

touched her as lightly as a butterfly's wing touches the flowers.

Her mother was of Spanish extraction, the granddaughter of a Cadiz merchant, who had failed in the wine trade and had left his sons and daughters to carve their own way to fortune. Her father had gone to San Francisco at the beginning of the gold fever, had been one of the first to understand the safest way to take advantage of the situation, and had started a wine shop and hotel, out of which he made a splendid fortune within fifteen years. He acquired wealth in good time to send his two daughters to Paris for their education, and by the time they were grown up he was rich enough to retire from business, and was able to dispose of his hotel and wine store for a sum which made a considerable addition to his capital. He established himself in a brand new first floor in one of the avenues of the Bois de Boulogne, a rich widower, more of an American than a Spaniard after his long exile, and he launched his two handsome daughters in Franco-American society. From Paris they went to London, and were well received in that

upper middle-class circle in which wealth can generally command a welcome, and in which a famous barrister, like Mr. Dalbrook, ranks as a star of the first magnitude. James Dalbrook was then at the apogee of his success, a large handsome man on the right side of his fortieth birthday. He was not by any means the kind of man who would seem a likely suitor for a beautiful girl of three and twenty; but it happened that his heavily handsome face and commanding manner, his deep, strong voice and brilliant conversation possessed just the charm that could subjugate Maria Morales' fancy. His conquest came upon him as a bewildering surprise, and nothing could be further from his thoughts than a marriage with the Spaniard's daughter; and yet within six weeks of their first meeting at a Royal Academy soirée in the shabby old rooms in Trafalgar Square, Mr. Dalbrook and Miss Morales were engaged, with the full consent of her father, who declared himself willing to give his daughter forty thousand pounds, strictly settled upon herself, for her dowry, but who readily doubled that sum when his future son-in-law revealed his desire to

become owner of Cheriton, and to found a family. For such a laudable purpose Mr. Morales was willing to make sacrifices; more especially as Maria's elder sister had offended him by marrying without his consent, an offence which was only cancelled by her untimely death soon after her marriage.

Juanita was only three years old when her father was raised to the bench, and she was not more than six when he was offered a peerage, which he accepted promptly, very glad to exchange the name of Dalbrook—still extant over the old shop window in Dorchester, though the old shopkeepers were at rest in the cemetery outside the town—for the title of Baron Cheriton.

As Lord Cheriton James Dalbrook linked himself indissolubly with the lands which his wife's money had bought; money made in a 'Frisco wine-shop for the most part. Happily, however, few of Lord Cheriton's friends were aware of that fact. Morales had traded under an assumed name in the miners' city, and had only resumed his patronymic on retiring from the bar and the wine vaults.

It will be seen, therefore, that Juanita could not

boast of aristocratic lineage upon either side. Her beauty and grace, her lofty carriage and high-bred air, were spontaneous as the beauty of a wild flower upon one of those furzy knolls over which her young feet had bounded in many a girlish race with her dogs or her chosen companion of the hour. She looked like the daughter of a duke, although one of her grandfathers had sold pots and pans, and the other had kept order, with a bowie-knife and revolver in his belt, over the humours of a 'Frisco tavern, in the days when the city was still in its rough and tumble infancy, fierce as a bull-pup. Her father, who as the years went on, worshipped this only child of his, never forgot that she lacked that one sovereign advantage of good birth and highly-placed kindred; and thus it was that from her childhood he had been on the watch for some alliance which should give her these advantages.

The opportunity had soon offered itself. Among his Dorsetshire neighbours one of the most distinguished was Sir Godfrey Carmichael, a man of old family and good estate, highly connected on the maternal side, and well connected all round, and

married to the daughter of an Irish peer. Sir Godfrey showed himself friendly from the hour of Mr. Dalbrook's advent in the neighbourhood. He declared himself delighted to welcome new blood when it came in the person of a man of talent and power. Lady Jane Carmichael was equally pleased with James Dalbrook's gentle wife. The friendship thus begun never knew any interruption till it ended suddenly in a ploughed field between Wareham and Wimbourne, where Sir Godfrey's horse blundered at a fence, fell, and rolled over his rider, ten years after Juanita's birth.

There were two daughters and a son, considerably their junior, who succeeded his father at the age of fifteen, and who had been Juanita's playfellow ever since she could run alone.

The two fathers had talked together of the possibilities of the future while their children were playing tennis on the lawn at Cheriton, or gathering blackberries on the common. Sir Godfrey was enough a man of the world to rejoice in the idea of his son's marriage with the heiress of Cheriton, albeit he knew that the little dark-eyed girl, with

the tall slim figure and graceful movements, had no place among the salt of the earth. His own estate was a poor thing compared with Cheriton and the Cheriton stone quarries; and he knew that Dalbrook's professional earnings had accumulated into a very respectable fortune invested in stocks and shares of the soundest quality. Altogether his son could hardly do better than continue to attach himself to that dark-eyed child as he was attaching himself now in his first year at Eton, riding his pony over to Cheriton every non-hunting day, and ministering to her childish caprices in all things.

The two mothers had talked of the future with more detail and more assurance than the fathers, as men of the world, had ventured upon. Lady Cheriton was in love with her little girl's boyish admirer. His frank, handsome face, open-hearted manner, and undeniable pluck realised her ideal of high-bred youth. His mother was the daughter of an earl, his grandmother was the niece of a duke. He had the right to call an existing duke his cousin. These things counted for much in the mind of the storekeeper's daughter. Her experience at a fashion-

able Parisian convent had taught her to worship rank; her experience of English middle-class society had not eradicated that weakness. And then she saw that this fine, frank lad was devoted to her daughter with all a boy's ardent feeling for his first sweetheart.

The years went on, and young Godfrey Carmichael and Juanita Dalbrook were sweethearts still—sweethearts always—sweethearts when he was at Eton, sweathearts when he was at Oxford, sweethearts in union, and sweethearts in absence, neither of them ever imagining any other love; and now, in the westering sunlight of this July evening, the bells of Cheriton Church were ringing a joy-peal to celebrate their wedded loves, and the little street was gay with floral archways and bright-coloured bunting, and mottoes of welcome and greeting, and Lady Cheriton's barouche was bringing the bride and bridegroom to their first honeymoon dinner, as fast as four horses could trot along the level road from quiet little Wareham.

By a curious fancy Juanita had elected to spend her honeymoon in that one house of which she ought to have been most weary, the good old house in

which she had been born, and where all her days of courtship, a ten-years' courtship, had been spent. In vain had the fairest scenes of Europe been suggested to her. She had travelled enough to be indifferent to mountains and lakes, glaciers, and fjords.

"I have seen just enough to know that there is no place like home," she said, with her pretty air of authority. "I won't have a honeymoon at all if I can't have it at Cheriton. I want to feel what it is like to have you all to myself in my own place, Godfrey, among all the things I love. I shall feel like a queen with a slave; I shall feel like Delilah with Samson. When you are quite tired of Cheriton—and subjection, you shall take me to the Priory; and once there you shall be master and I will be slave."

"Sweet mastership, tyrannous slavery," he answered, laughing. "My darling, Cheriton will suit me better than any other place in the world for my honeymoon, for I shall be near my future electors, and shall be able to study the political situation in all its bearings upon—the Isle of Purbeck."

Sir Godfrey was to stand for his division of the

county in the election that was looming in the distance of the late autumn. He was very confident of success, as a young man might be who came of a time-honoured race, and knew himself popular in the district, armed with all the newest ideas, too, full to the brim of the most modern intelligence, a brilliant debater at Oxford, a favourite everywhere. His marriage would increase his popularity and strengthen his position, with the latent power of that larger wealth which must needs be his in the future.

The sun was shining in golden glory upon grey stone roofs and grey stone walls, clothed with rose and honeysuckle, clematis and trumpet ash—upon the village forge, where there had been no work done since the morning, where the fire was out, and the men were lounging at door and window in their Sunday clothes—upon the three or four village shops, and the two village inns, the humble little house of call opposite the forge, with its queer old sign, "Live and Let Live," and the good old "George Hotel," with sprawling, dilapidated stables and spacious yard, where the mail-coach used to stop in the days that were gone.

There was a floral arch between the little tavern and the forge—a floral display along the low rustic front of the butcher's shop—and the cottage post-office was converted into a bower. There were calico mottoes flapping across the road—"Welcome to the Bride and Bridegroom," "God Bless Them Both," "Long Life and Happiness," and other fond and hearty phrases of time-honoured familiarity. But those clashing bells, with their sound of tumultuous gladness, a joy that clamoured to the blue skies above and the woods below, and out to the very sea yonder, in its loud exuberance, those and the smiling faces of the villagers were the best of all welcomes.

There were gentlefolks among the crowd—a string of pony carts and carriages drawn up on the long slip of waste grass beyond the forge, just where the road turned off to Cheriton Chase ; and there were two or three horsemen, one a young man upon a fine bay cob, who had been walking his horse about restlessly for the last hour or so, sometimes riding half a mile towards the station in his impatience.

The carriage came towards the turning point, the bride bowing and smiling as she returned the greet-

ings of gentle and simple. Emotion had paled the delicate olive of her complexion, but her large dark eyes were bright with gladness. Her straw-coloured tussore gown and leghorn hat were the perfection of simplicity, and seemed to surround her with an atmosphere of coolness amidst the dust and glare of the road.

At sight of the young man on the bay cob she put her hand on Sir Godfrey's arm and said something to him, on which he told the coachman to stop. They had driven slowly through the village, and the horses pulled up readily at the turn of the road.

"Only to think of your coming so far to greet us, Theodore," said Juanita, leaning out of the carriage to shake hands with the owner of the cob.

"I wanted to be among the first to welcome you, that was all," he answered, quietly. "I had half a mind to ride to the station and be ready to hand you into your carriage, but I thought Sir Godfrey might think me a nuisance."

"No fear of that, my dear Dalbrook," said the bridegroom. "I should have been very glad to see you. Did you ride all the way from Dorchester?"

"Yes; I came over early in the morning, breakfasted with a friend, rested the cob all day, and now he is ready to carry me home again."

"What devotion!" said Juanita, laughingly, yet with a shade of embarrassment.

"What good exercise for Peter, you mean. Keeps him in condition against the cubbing begins. God bless you, Juanita. I can't do better than echo the invocation above our heads, 'God bless the bride and bridegroom."

He shook hands with them both for the second time. A faint glow of crimson swept over his frank fair face as he clasped those hands. His honest grey eyes looked at his cousin for a moment with grave tenderness, in which there was the shadow of a life-long regret. He had loved and wooed her, and resigned her to her more favoured lover, and he was honest in his desire for her happiness. His own gladness, his own life, seemed to him of small account when weighed against her well-being.

"You must come and dine with us before we leave Cheriton, Dalbrook," said Sir Godfrey.

"You are very good. I am off to Heidelberg for a holiday as soon as I can wind up my office work. I will offer myself to you later on, if I may, when you are settled at the Priory."

"Come when you like. Good-bye."

The carriage turned the corner. The crowd burst into a cheer: one, two, three, and then another one: and then three more cheers louder than the first three, and the horses were on the verge of bolting for the rest of the way to Cheriton.

Theodore Dalbrook rode slowly away from the village festivities, rode away from the clang of the joy bells, and the sound of rustic triple bob majors. It would be night before he reached Dorchester; but there was a moon, and he knew every yard of high road, every grassy ride across the wide barren heath between Cheriton and the old Roman city. He knew the road and he knew his horse, which was as good of its kind as there was to be found in the county of Dorset. He was not a rich man, and he had to work hard for his living, but he was the son of a well-to-do father, and he never stinted the price of the horse that carried him, and which was

something more to Theodore Dalbrook than most men's horses are to them. It was his own familiar friend, companion, and solace. A man might have understood as much only to see him lean over the cob's neck, and pat him, as he did to-night, riding slowly up the hill that leads from Cheriton to the wild ridge of heath above Branksea Island.

Theodore Dalbrook, junior partner in the firm of Dalbrook & Son, Cornhill, Dorchester, was a more distant relative of Juanita's than the sandy first cousin in the auctioneer's office whom Lord Cheriton had once hated as the only alternative to a charitable endowment. The sandy youth was the only son of Lord Cheriton's elder brother, long since dead. Theodore was the grandson of a certain Matthew Dalbrook, a second cousin of Lord Cheriton's, and once upon a time the wealthiest and most important member of the Dalbrook family. The humble-minded couple in the crockery shop had looked up to Matthew Dalbrook, solicitor, with a handsome old house in Cornhill, a smart gig, a stud of three fine horses, and half the county people for his clients. To the plain folks behind the counter,

who dined at one and supped on cold meat and pickles and Dutch cheese at nine of the clock, Mr. Dalbrook, the lawyer, was a great man. They were moved by his condescension when he dropped in to the five o'clock tea, and talked over old family reminiscences, the farmhouse on the Weymouth Road, which was the cradle of their race, and where they had all known good days while the old people were alive, and while the homestead was a family rendezvous. That he should deign to take tea and water-cresses in the little parlour behind the shop, he who had a drawing-room almost as big as a church, and a man servant in plain clothes to wait upon him at his six o'clock dinner, was a touching act of humility in their eyes. When their younger boy brought home prizes and certificates of all kinds from the grammar school it was from Matthew they sought advice, modestly, and with the apprehension of being deemed over-ambitious.

"I'm afraid he's too much of a scholar for the business," said the mother, shyly, looking fondly at her tall overgrown son, pallid with rapid growth and overmuch Greek and Latin.

"Of course he is; that boy is too good to sell pots and pans. You must send him to the University, Jim."

Jim, the father, looked despondently at James, the son. The University meant something awful in the crockery merchant's mind; a vast expenditure of money; dreadful hazards to religion and morals; friendships with dukes and marquises, whose influence would alienate the boy from his parents, and render him scornful of the snug back parlour, with his grandfather's portrait over the mantelpiece, painted in oils by a gifted townsman, who had once had a picture very nearly hung in the Royal Academy.

"I couldn't afford to send him to college," he said.

"Oh, but you must afford it. I must help you, if you and Sarah haven't got enough in an old stocking anywhere—as I dare say you have. My boys are at the University, and they didn't do half as well at the grammar school as your boy has done. He must go to Cambridge, he must be entered at Trinity Hall, and if he works hard and keeps steady

he needn't cost you a fortune. You would work, eh, James?"

"Wouldn't I just, that's all," James replied with emphasis.

His heart had sickened at the prospect of the crockery business; the consignments of pots and pans; the returned empties, invoices, quarterly accounts, matchings, rivetings, dust, straw, dirt, and degradation. He could not see the nobility of labour in that dusty shop, below the level of the pavement, amid ewers and basins, teacups and beer jugs, sherries and ports. But to work in the University —hard by that great college where Bacon had worked, and Newton, and a host of the mighty dead, and where Whewell, a self-made man, was still head—to work among the sons of gentlemen, and with a view to the profession of a gentleman. *That* would be labour for which to live; for which to die, if need be.

"If—if mother and me were to strain a p'int," mused the crockery man, who was better able to afford the University for his son than many a gentleman of Dorset whose boys had to be sent there,

willy nilly, "if mother and me that have worked so hard for our money was willing to spend a goodish bit of it upon sending him to college, what are we to do with him after we've made a fine gentleman of him? *That's* where it is, you see, Mat."

"You are not going to make a fine gentleman of him. God forbid. If he does well at Cambridge you can make a lawyer of him. Trinity Hall is the nursery of lawyers. You can article him to me; and look you here, Jim, if I don't have to help you pay for his education, I'll give him his articles. There, now, what do you say to that?"

The offer was pronounced a generous one, and worthy of a blood relation; but James Dalbrook never took advantage of his kinsman's kindness. His University career was as successful as his progress at the quaint stone grammar school, and his college friends, who were neither dukes nor marquises, but fairly sensible young men, all advised him to apply himself to the higher branch of the law. So James Dalbrook, of Trinity Hall, ate his dinners at the Temple during his last year of undergraduate life, came out seventh wrangler, was called

to the Bar, and in due course wore crimson, velvet, and ermine, and became Lord Cheriton, a man whose greatness in somewise overshadowed the small provincial dignity of the house of Matthew Dalbrook, erstwhile head of the family.

The Dalbrooks, of Dorchester, had gone upon their way quietly, thriving, respected, but in no wise distinguished. Matthew, junior, had succeeded his father, Matthew, senior, and the firm in Cornhill had been Dalbrook & Son for more than thirty years; and now Theodore, the eldest of a family of five, was Son, and his grandfather, the founder of the firm, was sleeping the sleep of the just in the cemetery outside Dorchester.

Lord Cheriton was too wise a man to forget old obligations or to avoid his kindred. There was nothing to be ashamed of in his connection with a thoroughly reputable firm like Dalbrook & Son. They might be provincial, but their name was a synonym for honour and honesty. They had taken as firm root in the land as the county families whose title-deeds and leases, wills and codicils they kept. They were well-bred, well-educated, God-fearing

people, with no struggling ambitions, no morbid craving to get upon a higher social level than the status to which their professional position and their means entitled them. They rode and drove good horses, kept good servants, lived in a good house, visited among the county people with moderation, but they made no pretensions to being "smart." They offered no sacrifices of fortune or self-respect to the modern Moloch—Fashion.

There was a younger son called Harrington, destined for the Church, and with advanced views upon church architecture and music, and there were two unmarried daughters, Janet and Sophia, also with advanced views upon the woman's rights question, and with a sovereign contempt for the standard young lady.

Theodore's lines were marked out for him with inevitable precision. He had been taken into partnership the day he was out of his articles, and at seven-and-twenty he was his father's right hand, and represented all that was modern and popular in the firm. He was steady as a rock, had an intellect of singular acuteness, a ready wit, and very pleasing

manners. He had, above all things, the inestimable gift of an equable and happy temper. He had been everybody's favourite from the nursery upwards, popular at school, popular at the University, popular in the local club, popular in the hunting field; and it was the prevailing opinion of Dorchester that he ought to marry an heiress and make a great position for the house of Dalbrook. Some people had gone so far as to say that he ought to marry Lord Cheriton's daughter.

He had been made free of the great house at Cheriton from the time he was old enough to visit anywhere. His family had been bidden to all notable festivities; had been duly called upon, at not too long intervals, by Lady Cheriton. He had ridden by Juanita's side in many a run with the South Dorset foxhounds, and had waited about with her outside many a covert. They had pic-nicked and made gipsy tea at Corfe Castle; they had rambled in the woods near Studland; they had sailed to Branksea, and, further away, to Lulworth Cove, and the romantic caves of Stare; but this had been all in frank cousinly friendship. Theodore

had seen only too soon that there was no room for him in his kinswoman's heart. He began by admiring her as the loveliest girl he had ever seen; he had ended by adoring her, and he adored her still; but with a loyal regard which accepted her position as another man's wife; and he would have died sooner than dishonour her by one unholy thought.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he rode slowly along the avenue that led into Dorchester. The moon was shining between the overarching boughs of the sycamores. The road with that high overarching roof had a solemn look in the moonlit stillness. The Roman amphitheatre yonder, with its grassy banks rising tier above tier, shone white in the moonbeams; the old town seemed half asleep. The house in Cornhill had a very Philistine look as compared with that fine old mansion of Cheriton which was present to his mind in very vivid colours to-night, those two wandering about the old Italian garden, hand-in-hand, wedded lovers, with the lamplit rooms open to the soft summer night, and the long terrace and stone balustrade and moss-

grown statues of nymph and goddess silvered by the moonbeams. The Cornhill house was a good old house notwithstanding, a panelled house of the Georgian era, with a wide entrance hall, and a well-staircase with carved oak balusters and a baluster rail a foot broad. The furniture had been very little changed since the days of Theodore's great-grandfather, for the late Mrs. Dalbrook had cherished no yearnings for modern art in the furniture line. Her gentle spirit had looked up to her husband as a leader of men, and had reverenced chairs and tables, bureaus and wardrobes that had belonged to his grandfather, as if they were made sacred by that association. And thus the good old house in the good old town had a savour of bygone generations, an old family air which the parvenu would buy for much gold if he could. True that the dining-room chairs were over-ponderous, and the dining-room pictures belonged to the obscure school of religious art in which you can only catch your saint or your martyr at one particular angle; yet the chairs were of a fine antique form, and bore the crest of the Dalbrooks on their shabby leather

backs, and the pictures had a respectable brownness which might mean Holbein or Rembrandt.

The drawing-room was large and bright, with four narrow, deeply-recessed windows commanding the broad street and the Antelope Hotel over the way, and deep window seats crammed with flowers. Here the oak panelling had been painted pale pink, and the mouldings picked out in a deeper tint by successive generations of Vandals, but the effect was cheerful, and the pink walls made a good background for the Chippendale secretaires and cabinets filled with willow-pattern Worcester or Crown Derby. The window-curtains were dark brown cloth, with a border of Berlin wool lilies and roses, a border which would have set the teeth of an æsthete on edge, but which blended with the general brightness of the room. Old Mrs. Matthew Dalbrook, the grandmother, and her three spinster daughters had toiled over those cross-stitch borders, and Theodore's mother would have deemed it sacrilege to have put aside this labour of a vanished life.

Harrington Dalbrook and his two sisters were in the drawing-room, each apparently absorbed in an

instructive book, and yet all three had been talking for the greater part of the evening. It was a characteristic of their highly intellectual lives to nurse a volume of Herbert Spencer or a treatise upon the deeper mysteries of Buddha, while they discussed the conduct or morals of their neighbours—or their gowns and bonnets.

"I thought you were never coming home, Theo," said Janet. "You don't mean to say you waited to see the bride and bridegroom?"

"That is exactly what I do mean to say. I had to get old Sandown's lease executed, and when I had finished my business I waited about to see them arrive. Do you think you could get me anything in the way of supper, Janie?"

"Father went to bed ever so long ago," replied Janet; "it's dreadfully late."

"But I don't suppose the cook has gone to bed, and perhaps she would condescend to cut me a sandwich or two," answered Theodore, ringing the bell.

His sisters were orderly young women who objected to eating and drinking out of regulation hours. Janet looked round the room discontentedly, thinking that her brother would make crumbs. Young men she

had observed, are almost miracle workers in the way of crumbs. They can get more superfluous crumbs out of any given piece of bread than the entire piece would appear to contain, looked at by the casual eye.

"I have found a passage in Spencer which most fully bears out *my* view, Theodore," said Sophia, severely, referring to an argument she had had with her brother the day before yesterday.

"How did she look?" asked Janet, openly frivolous for the nonce.

"Lovelier than I ever saw her look in her life," answered Theodore. "At least I thought so."

He wondered, as he said those words, whether it had been his own despair at the thought of having irrevocably lost her which invested her familiar beauty with a new and mystic power. "Yes, she looked exquisitely lovely, and completely happy—an ideal bride."

"If her nose were a thought longer her face would be almost perfect," said Janet. "How was she dressed?"

"I could no more tell you than I could say how many petals there are in that Dijon rose yonder.

She gave me an impression of cool soft colour. I think there was yellow in her hat—pale yellow, like a primrose."

"Men are such dolts about women's dress," retorted Janet, impatiently; "and yet they pretend to have taste and judgment, and to criticize everything we wear."

"I think you may rely upon us for knowing what we *don't* like," said Theodore.

He seated himself in his father's easy chair, a roomy old chair with projecting sides, that almost hid him from the other occupants of the room. He was weary and sad, and their chatter irritated his overstrung nerves. He would have gone straight to his own room on arriving, but that would have set them wondering, and he did not want to be wondered about. He wanted to keep his secret, or as much of it as he could. No doubt those three knew that he had been fond of her, very fond; that he would have sacrificed half his lifetime to win her for the other half; but they did not know how fond. They did not know that he would fain have melted down all the sands of time into one grain of gold—one golden day in which to hold her to his heart and know she loved him.

CHAPTER II.

"And warm and light I felt her clasping hand
When twined in mine; she followed where I went."

THERE is a touch of childishness in all honeymoon couples, a something which suggests the Babes in the Wood, left to play together by the Arch Deceiver, Fate; wandering hand in hand in the morning sunshine, gathering flowers, pleased with the mossy banks and leafy glades, like those children of the old familiar story, before ever hunger or cold or fear came upon them, before the shadow of night and death stole darkly on their path. Even Godfrey Carmichael, a sensible, highly-educated young man, whose pride it was to march in the van of progress and enlightenment, even he had that touch of childishness which is adorable in a lover, and which lasts, oh, so short a time: transient as the bloom on the peach, the down on the butterfly's wing, the morning dew on a rose.

He had loved her all his life, as it seemed to him. They had been companions, friends, lovers, for longer than either could remember, so gradual had been the growth of love. Yet the privilege of belonging to each other was not the less sweet because of this old familiarity.

"Are we really married—really husband and wife —Godfrey?" asked Juanita, nestling to his side as they stood together in the wide verandah where they breakfasted on these July mornings among climbing roses and clematis. "Husband and wife —such prosaic words. I heard you speak of me to the Vicar yesterday as 'my wife.' It gave me quite a shock."

"Were you sorry to think it was true?"

"Sorry—no! But wife. The word has such a matter-of-fact sound. It means a person who writes cheques for the house accounts, revises the bill of fare, and takes all the blame when the servants do wrong."

"Shall I call you my idol, then, my goddess—the enchantress whose magic wand wafts gladness and sunshine over my existence?"

"No, call me wife. It is a good word, after all, Godfrey—a good serviceable word, a word that will stand wear and tear. It means for ever."

They breakfasted *tête-à-tête* in their bower of roses; they wandered about the Chase or sat in the garden all day long. They led an idle desultory life like little children, and wondered that evening came so soon, and stayed up late into the summer night, steeping themselves in the starshine and silence which seemed new to them in their mutual delight.

There was a lovely view from that broad terrace, with its Italian balustrade and statues, its triple flight of marble steps descending to an Italian garden, which had been laid out in the Augustan age of Pope and Addison, when the distinctive feature of a great man's garden was stateliness. Here was the lovers' favourite loitering place when the night grew late, Juanita looking like Juliet in her loose white silk tea gown, with its Venetian amplitude of sleeve and its mediæval gold embroidery. The fashionable dressmaker who made that gown had known how to adapt her art to Miss Dalbrook's

beauty. The long straight folds accentuated every line of the finely moulded figure, fuller than the average girlish figure, suggestive of Juno rather than Psyche. She was two inches taller than the average girl, and looked almost as tall as her lover as she stood beside him in the moonlight, gazing dreamily at the landscape.

This hushed and solemn hour on the verge of midnight was their favourite time. Then only were they really alone, secure in the knowledge that all the household was sleeping, and that they had their world verily to themselves, and might be as foolish as they liked. Once at sight of a shooting star Juanita flung herself upon her lover's breast and sobbed aloud. It was some minutes before he could soothe her.

"My love, my love, what does it mean?" he asked, perplexed by her agitation.

"I saw the star, and I prayed that we might never be parted; and then it flashed upon me that we *might*, and I could not bear the thought," she sobbed, clinging to him like a frightened child.

"My dear one, what should part us, except death?"

"Ah, Godfrey, death is everywhere. How could a good God make His creatures so fond of each other and yet part them so cruelly as He does sometimes?"

"Only to unite them again in another world, Nita. I feel as if our two lives must go on in an endless chain, circling among those stars yonder, which could not have been made to be for ever unpeopled. There are happy lovers there at this instant, I am convinced—lovers who have lived before us here, and have been translated to a higher life yonder; lovers who have felt the pangs of parting, the ecstacy of reunion."

He glanced vaguely towards that starry heaven, while he fondly smoothed the dark hair upon Juanita's brow. It was not easy to win her back to cheerfulness. That vision of possible grief had too completely possessed her. Godfrey was fain to be serious, finding her spirits so shaken; so they talked together gravely of that unknown hereafter which philosophy or religion may map out with mathematical distinctness, but which remains to the individual soul for ever mysterious and awful.

Her husband found it wiser to talk of solemn things, finding her so sad, and she took comfort from that serious conversation.

"Let us lead good lives, dear, and hope for the best in other worlds," he said. "There is sound sense in the Buddhist theory, that we are the makers of our own spiritual destiny, and that a man may be in advance of his fellow men, even in getting to Heaven."

Those grave thoughts had little place in Juanita's mind next day, which was the first day the lovers devoted to practical things. They started directly after breakfast for a *tête-à-tête* drive to Milbrook Priory, where certain alterations and improvements were contemplated in the rooms which were to be Juanita's. Godfrey's widowed mother, Lady Jane Carmichael, had transferred herself and her belongings to a villa at Swanage, where she was devoting herself to the creation of a garden, which was on a small scale to repeat the beauties of her flat old-fashioned flower garden at the Priory. It irked her somewhat to think how long the hedges of yew and holly would take to grow; but there was a certain

pleasure in creation. She was a mild, loving creature, with an aristocratic profile, silvery grey hair, and a small fragile figure; a woman who looked a patrician to her finger tips, and whom everybody imposed upon. Her blue blood had not endowed her with the power to rule. She adored her son, was very fond of Juanita, and resigned her place in her old home without a sigh.

"The Priory was a great deal too big for me," she told her particular friends. "I used to feel very dreary there when Godfrey was at Oxford, and afterwards, for of course he was often away. It was only in the shooting season that the house looked cheerful. I hope they will soon have a family, and then that will enliven the place a little."

Milbrook Village and Milbrook Priory lay twelve miles nearer Dorchester than Cheriton Chase. Juanita enjoyed the long drive in the fresh morning air through a region of marsh and watery meadow, where the cattle gave charm and variety to a landscape which would have been barren and monotonous without them, a place of winding streams on which the summer sunlight was shining.

The Priory was by no means so fine a place as Cheriton, but it was old, and not without interest, and Lady Jane was justified in the assertion that it was too large for her. It would be too small perhaps for Sir Godfrey and his wife in the days to come, when in the natural course of events James Dalbrook would be at rest after his life labour, and Cheriton would belong to Juanita.

"No doubt they will like Cheriton better than the Priory when we are all dead and gone," said Lady Jane, with her plaintive air. "I only hope they will have a family. Big houses are so dismal without little people."

This idea of a family was almost a craze with Lady Jane Carmichael. She had idolized her only son, had been miserable at every parting, and it had seemed a hard thing to her that there was not more of him, as she had herself expressed it.

"Godfrey has been the dearest boy. I only wish I had six of him," she would say piteously; and now her mind projected itself into the future, and she pictured a bevy of grandchildren—numerous as a covey of partridges in the upland fields of the home

farm at Cheriton—and fancied herself lavishing her hoarded treasures of love upon them. She had grandchildren already, and to spare, the offspring of her two daughters, but these did not bear the honoured name of Carmichael, and, though they were very dear to her maternal heart, they were not what Godfrey's children would be to her.

She would be gone, she told herself, before they would be old enough to forsake her. She would be gone before those young birds grew too strong upon the wing. A blessed spell of golden years lay before her; a nursery, and then a schoolroom; and then perhaps before the last dim closing scene a bridal, a granddaughter clinging to her in the sweet sadness of leave-taking, a fair young face crowned with orange flowers pressed against her own in the bride's happy kiss—and then she would say *Nunc dimittis*, and feel that her cup of gladness had been filled to the brim.

The lovers' talk was all of that shadowy future, as the pair of greys bowled gaily along the level road. The horses were Godfrey's favourite pair, and belonged to a team of chestnuts and greys which had

won him some distinction last season in Hyde Park, when the coaches met at the corner by the Magazine, and when the handsome Miss Dalbrook, Lord Cheriton's heiress, was the cynosure of many eyes. The thoughts of Sir Godfrey and his wife were far from Hyde Park and the Four-in-Hand Club this morning. Their minds were filled with simple rural anticipations, and had almost a patriarchal turn, as of an Arcadian pair whose wealth was all in flocks and herds, and green pastures like these by which they were driving.

The Priory stood on low ground between Wareham and Wimbourne, sheltered from the north by a bold ridge of heath, screened on the east by a little wood of oaks and chestnuts, Spanish chestnuts, with graceful drooping branches, whose glossy leaves contrasted with the closer foliage of the rugged old oaks. The house was built of Purbeck stone, and its bluish grey was touched with shades of gold and silvery green where the lichens and mosses crept over it, while one long southern wall was clothed with trumpet-ash and magnolia, myrtle and rose, as with a closely interwoven curtain of greenery, from

which the small latticed windows flashed back the sunshine.

Nothing at the Priory was so stately as its counterpart at Cheriton. There were marble balustrades and rural gods there on the terrace; here there was only a broad gravel walk along the southern front, with a little old shabby stone temple at each end. At Cheriton three flights of marble steps led from the terrace to the Italian garden, and then again three more flights led to a garden on a lower level, and so by studied gradations to the bottom of the slope on which the mansion was built. Here house and garden were on the same level, and those gardens which Lady Jane had so cherished were distinguished only by an elegant simplicity. Between the garden and a park of less than fifty acres there was only a sunk fence, and the sole glory of that modest domain lay in a herd of choice Channel Island cows, which had been Lady Jane's pride. She had resigned them to Juanita without a sigh, although each particular beast had been to her as a friend.

"My dear, what could I do with cows in a villa?"

she said, when Juanita suggested that she should at least keep her favourites, Beauty, and Maydew, and Coquette. "Of course, as you say, I could rent a couple of paddocks; but I should not like to see the herd divided. Besides, you will want them all by-and-by, when you have a family."

Nita stepped lightly across the threshold of her future home. The old grey porch was embedded in roses and trailing passion flowers. Everything had a shabby, old-world look compared with Cheriton. Here there had been no improvement for over a century; all things had been quiescent as in the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty.

"What a dear old house it is, Godfrey, and how everything in it speaks to me of your ancestors—your own ancestors—not other people's! That makes all the difference. At Cheriton I feel always as if I were surrounded by malevolent ghosts. I can't see them, but I know they are there. Those poor Strangways, how they must hate me."

"If there are any living Strangways knocking about the world houseless, or at any rate landless, I don't suppose they feel over kindly disposed to

you," said Godfrey; "but the ghosts have done with human habitations. It can matter very little to them who lives in the rooms where they were once happy or miserable, as the case may be. Has your father ever heard anything of the old family?"

"Never. He says there are no Strangways left on this hemisphere. There may be a remnant of the race in Australia," he says, "for he heard of a cousin of Reginald Strangway's who went out to Brisbane years ago to work with a sheep farmer on the Darling Downs. There is no one else of the old race and the old name that he can tell me about. I take a morbid interest in the subject, you know. If I were to meet a very evil-looking tramp in the woods and he were to threaten me, I should suspect him of being a Strangway. They all *must* hate us."

"With a very unreasonable hatred, then, Nita, for it was no fault of your father's that the family went to the bad. I have heard my father talk of the Strangways many a time over his wine. They had been a reckless, improvident race for ever so many

generations, men who lived only for the pleasure of the hour, whose motto was '*Carpe diem*' in the worst sense of the words. There was a Strangway who was the fashion for a short time during the Regency, wore a hat of his own invention, and got himself entangled with a popular actress, who sued him for breach of promise. *He* dipped the property. There was a racing Strangway who kept a stable at Newmarket, and married—well—never mind how. *He* dipped the property. There was Georgiana Strangway, an heiress and a famous beauty, in the Sailor King's reign. Two of the Royal Dukes wanted to marry her; but she ran away with a bandmaster in the Blues. She used to ride in Hyde Park at nine o'clock every morning in a green cloth spencer trimmed with sable, at a time when very few women rode in London. She saw the bandmaster, fell over head and ears in love with him, and bolted. They were married at Gretna. He spent as much of her fortune as he could get at, and was reported to have thrashed her before they parted. She set up a boarding-house at Ostend, gambled, drank cheap brandy, and died at five-and-forty."

"What a dreadful ghost *she* would be to meet," said Nita, with a shudder.

"From first to last they have been a bad lot," concluded Sir Godfrey, "and the Isle of Purbeck was a prodigious gainer when your father became master of Cheriton Chase and Baron Cheriton of Cheriton."

"*That* is what they must feel worst of all," said Nita, speaking of the dead and the living as if they were one group of banished shades. "It must be hard for them to think that a stranger takes his title from the land that was once theirs, from the house in which they were born. Poor ill-behaved things, I can't help being sorry for them."

"My fanciful Nita, they do not deserve your pity. They made their own lives, love. They have only suffered the result of their own Karma."

"I only hope they will be better off in their next incarnations, and that they won't get to that dreadful eighth world which leads nowhere," said Juanita.

She made this light allusion to a creed which she and her lover had discussed seriously many a time in their graver moods. They had read Mr. Sinnett's

books together, and had given themselves up in somewise to the fascinating theories of Esoteric Buddhism, and had been impressed by the curious parallel between that semi-fabulous Reformer of the East and the Teacher and Redeemer in whom they both believed.

They went about the house together, Nita admiring everything, as if she were seeing those old rooms for the first time. The alterations to be made were of the smallest. Nita would allow scarcely any change.

"Whatever was nice enough for Lady Jane must be good enough for me," she said, decisively, when Godfrey proposed improvements which would have changed the character of his mother's morning room; a conservatory, and a large bay window opposite the fire-place, for instance.

"But it is such a shabby old hole, compared with your room at Cheriton."

"It is a dear old hole, sir, and I won't have it altered in the smallest detail. I adore those deep-set windows and wide window-seats; and this apple-blossom chintz is simply delicious. Faded, sir?

What of that? One can't buy such patterns now-a-days, for love or money. And that old Chinese screen must have belonged to a mandarin of the highest rank. My only feeling will be that I am a wretch in appropriating dear Lady Jane's surroundings. This room fitted her like a glove."

"She is charmed to surrender it to you, love; and your forbearance in the matter of improvement will delight her."

"Your improvements would have been destruction. A conservatory opening out of that window would suggest a city man's drawing-room at Tulse Hill. I have seen such in my childhood when mother used to visit odd people on the Surrey side of the river."

"Loveliest insolence!"

"Oh, I am obliged to cultivate insolence. It is a parvenue's only defensive weapon. We new-made people always give ourselves more airs than you who were born in the purple."

She roamed from room to room, expatiating upon everything with a childlike pleasure, delighted at the idea of this her new kingdom, over which she

was to reign with undivided sovereignty. Cheriton was ever so much grander; but at Cheriton she had only been the daughter of the house; indulged in every fancy, yet in somewise in a state of subjection. Here she was to be sole mistress, with Godfrey for her obedient slave.

"And now show me your rooms, sir," she exclaimed, with pretty authority. "I may wish to make some improvements *there*."

"You shall work your will with them, dearest, as you have done with their master."

He led her to his study and general den, a fine old room looking into the stable-yard, capacious, but gloomy.

"This is dreadful," she cried, "no view, and ever so far from *me!* You must have the room next the morning-room, so that we can run in to each other, and talk at any moment."

"That is one of the best bedrooms."

"What of that! We can do without superfluous bedrooms; but I cannot do without you. This room of yours will make a visitor's bedroom. If he or she doesn't like it, he or she can go away, and

leave us to ourselves, which *we* shall like ever so much better, shan't we?" she asked, caressingly, as if life were going to be one long honeymoon.

Of course he assented, kissed the red frank lips, and assured her that for him bliss meant a perpetual *tete-à-tête*. Yes, his study should be next her boudoir; so that even in his busiest hours he should be able to turn to her for gladness—refreshing himself with her smiles after a troublesome interview with his bailiff—taking counsel with her about every change in his stable, sharing her interest in every new book.

"I will give orders about the change at once," he said, "so that everything may be ready for us when you are tired of Cheriton."

They lunched gaily in the garden. Nita hated eating indoors when the weather was good enough for an *al fresco* meal. They lunched under a Spanish chestnut that made a tent of foliage on the lawn in front of the house. They lingered over the meal, full of talk, finding a new world of conversation suggested by their surroundings; and

then the greys were brought round to the hall door, and they started on the return journey.

It began to rain before they reached Cheriton, and the afternoon clouded over with a look of premature winter. No saunterings on the terrace this evening; no midnight meanderings among the cypresses and yews, the gleaming statues and dense green walls; as if they had been Romeo and Juliet, wedded and happy, in the garden at Verona. For the first time since the beginning of their honeymoon they were obliged to stay indoors.

"It is positively chilly," exclaimed Juanita, as her maid carried off her damp mantle.

"My dearest love, I'm afraid you've caught cold," said Godfrey, with apprehension.

"Do I ever catch cold, Godfrey?" she cried, scornfully; and indeed her splendid physique seemed to negative the idea as she stood before him, tall and buoyant, with the carnation of health upon cheek and lips, her eyes sparkling, her head erect.

"Well, no, my Juno, I believe you are as free from all such weakness as human nature can be;

but I shall order fires all the same, and I implore you to put on a warm gown."

"I will," she answered, gaily. "You shall see me in my copper plush."

"Thanks, love. That is a vision to live for."

"Shall we have tea in my dressing-room—or in yours?"

"In mine. I think we have taken tea in almost every other room in the house, as well as in every corner of the garden."

It had been one of her girlish caprices to devise new places for their afternoon tea. Whether it had been as keen a delight to the footmen to carry Japanese tables and bamboo chairs from pillar to post was open to question; but Juanita loved to colonize, as she called it.

"I feel that wherever we establish our teapot we invest the spot with the sanctity of home," she said.

Fires were ordered, and tea in Sir Godfrey's dressing-room.

It was Lord Dalbrook's dressing-room actually, and altogether a sacred chamber. It had been one

of the best bedrooms in the days of the Strangways; but his Lordship liked space, and had chosen this room for his den—a fine old room, with full length portraits of the Sir Joshua period let into the panelling. The furniture was of the plainest, and very different from the luxurious appointments of the other rooms, for these very chairs and tables, and yonder substantial mahogany desk, had done duty in James Dalbrook's chambers in the Temple thirty years before. So had the heavy-looking clock on the chimney-piece, surmounted by a bronze Saturn leaning upon his scythe. So had the brass candlesticks, and the ink-stained red morocco blotter on the desk. He had fallen asleep in that capacious arm-chair many a time in the small hours, after struggling with the intricacies of a railway bill or poring over a volume of precedents.

The thick Persian carpet, the velvet window-curtains, panelled walls, and fine old fireplace gave a look of subdued splendour to the room, in spite of the dark and heavy furniture. There was a large vase of roses on the desk, where Lord Cheriton never tolerated a flower; and there were more roses

on the chimney-piece ; and some smart bamboo chairs, many coloured, like Joseph's coat, had been brought from Nita's morning room—and so, with logs blazing on the floriated iron dogs, and a scarlet tea-table set out with blue and gold china, and a Moorish copper kettle swinging over a lamp, the room had as gay an aspect as any one could desire.

Juanita had made her toilet by the time the tea-table was ready, and came in from her room next door, a radiant figure in a gleaming copper-coloured gown, flowing loose from throat to foot, and with no adornment except a broad collar and cuffs of old Venice point. Her brilliant complexion and southern eyes and ebon hair triumphed over the vivid hue of the gown, and it was at her Sir Godfrey looked as she came beaming towards him, and not at the dressmaker's master-piece.

"How do you like it?" she asked, with childlike pleasure in her fine raiment. "I ought to have kept it till October, but I couldn't resist putting it on, just to see what you think of it. I hope you won't say it's gaudy."

"My dearest, you might be clad in a russet cloud

for anything I should know to the contrary. A quarter of a century hence, when you are beginning to fancy yourself *passée* we will talk about gowns. It will be of some consequence then how you dress. It can be none now."

"That is just a man's ignorance, Godfrey," she said, shaking her finger at him, as she seated herself in one of the bamboo chairs, a dazzling figure in the light of the blazing logs, which danced about her eyes and hair and copper-coloured gown in a bewildering manner. "You think me handsome, I suppose?"

"Eminently so."

"And you think I should be just as handsome if I dressed anyhow—in a badly-fitting Tussore, for instance, made last year and cleaned this year, and with a hat of my own trimming, eh, Godfrey?"

"Every bit as handsome."

"That shows what an ignoramus a University education can leave a man. My dearest boy, half my good looks depend upon my dressmaker. Not for worlds would I have you see me a dowdy, if only for a quarter of an hour. The disillusion might

last a lifetime. I dress to please you, remember, sir. It was of you I thought when I was choosing my trousseau. I want to be lovely in your eyes always, always, always."

"You need make no effort to attain your wish. You have put so strong a spell upon my eyes that with me at least you are independent of the dressmaker's art."

"Again I say you don't know what you are talking about. But frankly now, do you think this gown too gaudy?"

"That coppery background to my Murillo Madonna. No, love; the colour suits you to perfection."

She poured out the tea, and then sank back in her comfortable chair, in a reverie, languid after her explorations at the Priory, full of a dreamlike happiness as she basked in the glow of the fire, welcome as a novel indulgence at this time of the year.

"There is nothing more delightful than a fire in July," she said.

Her eyes wandered about the room idly.

"Do you call them handsome?" she asked presently.

Godfrey looked puzzled. Was she still harping on the dress question, or was she challenging his admiration for those glorious eyes which he had been watching in their rovings for a lazy five minutes.

"I mean the Strangways. That is their famous beauty—the girl in the scanty white satin petticoat, with the goat. Imagine any one walking about a wood, with a goat, in white satin. What queer ideas portrait painters must have had in those days. She is very lovely though, isn't she?"

"She is not my ideal. I don't admire that narrow Cupid's-bow mouth, the lips pinched up as if they were pronouncing 'prunes and prism.' The eyes are large and handsome, but too round, the complexion is wax-dollish. No, she is not *my* ideal."

"I should have been miserable if you had admired her."

"There is a face in the hall which I like ever so much better, and yet I doubt if it is a good face."

"Which is that?"

"The face of the girl in that group of John Strangway's three children."

"That girl with the towsled hair and bright blue

eyes. Yes, she must have been handsome—but she looks—I hope you won't be shocked, but I really can't help saying it—that girl looks a devil."

"Poor soul! Her temper did not do much good for her. I believe she came to a melancholy end."

"How was that?"

"She eloped from a school in Switzerland with an officer in a line regiment—a love match; but she went wrong a few years afterwards, left her husband, and died in poverty at Boulogne, I believe."

"Another ghost!" exclaimed Juanita, dolefully. "Poor, lost soul, she *must* walk. I can't help feeling sorry for her—married to a man who was unkind to her, perhaps, and whom she discovered unworthy of her love. And then years afterwards meeting some one worthier and better, whom she loved passionately. That is dreadful! Oh, Godfrey! if I had been married before I saw you—and we had met—and you had cared for me—God knows what kind of woman I should have been. Perhaps I should have been one of those poor souls who have a history, the women mother and her friends stare at and whisper about in the Park. Why are people so

keenly interested in them, I wonder? Why can't they leave them alone?"

"It would be charity to do so."

"No one is charitable—in London."

"Do you think people are more indulgent in the country?"

"I suppose not. I'm afraid English people keep all their charity for the Continent. I shall never look at the girl in that group without thinking of her sad story. She looks hardly fifteen in the picture. Poor thing! She did not know what was coming."

They loitered over their tea table, making the most of their happiness. The sweetness of their dual life had not begun to pall. It was still new and wonderful to be together thus, unrestrained by any other presence.

In the midst of their gay talk Juanita's eyes wandered to the bronze Time upon the chimney piece, and the familiar figure suggested gloomy ideas.

"Oh, Godfrey! look at that grim old man with his scythe, mowing down our happy moments so fast that we can hardly taste their sweetness before they speed away. To think that our lives are hurry-

ing past us like a rapid river, and that we shall be like him" (pointing distastefully to the type of old age —the wrinkled brow and flowing beard) "before we know that we have lived."

"It is a pity, sweet, that life should be so short."

Her glance wandered to the dark oak panel above the clock, and she started up from her low chair with a faint scream, stood on tiptoe before the fireplace, snatched half-a-dozen scraggy peacock's feathers from the panel, and threw them at her husband's feet.

"Look at those," she exclaimed, pointing to them as they lay there.

"Peacock's feathers! What have they done that you should use them so?"

"Oh, Godfrey, don't you know?" she asked, earnestly.

"Don't I know what?"

"That peacock's feathers bring ill luck. It is fatal to take them into a house. They are an evil omen. And father *will* pick them up when he is strolling about the lawn, and *will* bring them indoors; though I am always scolding him for his

obstinate folly, and always throwing the horrid things away."

"And this kind of thing has been going on for some years, I suppose ?" asked Godfrey, smiling at her intensity.

"Ever since I can remember."

"And have the peacock's feathers brought you misfortune ?"

She looked at him gravely for a few moments, and then burst into a joyous laugh.

"No, no, no, no," she said, "Fate has been over kind to me. I have never known sorrow. Fate has given me *you*. I am the happiest woman in the world —for there can't be another *you*, and you are mine. It is like owning the Kohinoor diamond ; one knows that one stands alone. Still, all the same, peacock's feathers are unlucky, and I will not suffer them in your room."

She picked up the offending feathers, twisted them into a ball, and flung them at the back of the deep old chimney, behind the smouldering logs ; and then she produced a chess board, and she and Godfrey began a game with the board on their knees, and played for an hour by firelight.

CHAPTER III.

"A deadly silence step by step increased,
Until it seemed a horrid presence there.'

That idea of the Strangways had taken hold of the bride's fancy. She went into the hall with Godfrey after dinner, and they looked together at the family group. The picture was a bishop's half-length, turned lengthwise, and the figures showed only the head and shoulders. The girl stood between the two boys, her left arm round her younger brother's neck. He was a lad of eleven or twelve, in an Eton jacket and broad white collar. The other boy was older than the girl, and was dressed in dark green corduroy. The heads were masterly, but the picture was uninteresting.

"Did you ever see three faces with so little fascination among the three?" asked Godfrey; "the boys look arrant cubs; the girl has the makings of a handsome woman, but the lines of her

mouth and chin have firmness enough for forty, and yet she could hardly have been over fifteen when that picture was painted."

"She has a lovely throat and lovely shoulders."

"Yes, the painter has made the most of those."

"And she has fine eyes."

"Fine as to colour and shape, but as cold as a Toledo blade—and as dangerous. I pity her husband."

"That must be a waste of pity. If he had been good to her she would not have run away from him."

"I am not sure of that. A woman with that mouth and chin would go her own gate if she trampled upon bleeding hearts. I wonder your father keeps these shadows of a vanished race."

"He would not part with them for worlds. They are like the peacock's feathers that he *will* bring indoors. I sometimes think he has a fancy for unlucky things. He says that as we have no ancestors of our own—to speak of—I suppose we must *have* ancestors, for everybody must have come down from Adam somehow——"

"Naturally, or from Adam's ancestor, the common progenitor of the Darwinian thesis."

"Don't be horrid. Father's idea is that as we have no ancestors of our own, we may as well keep the Strangway portraits. The faces are the history of the house, father said, when mother wanted those dismal old pictures taken down to make way for a collection of modern art. So there they are, and I can't help thinking that they *overlook* us."

They were still standing before the trio of young faces contemplatively.

"Are they *all* dead?" asked Juanita, after a pause.

"God knows. I believe it is a long time since any of them were heard of. Jasper Blake talks to me about them sometimes. He was in service here, you know, before he became my father's bailiff. In fact, he only left Cheriton after the old squire's death. He is fond of talking of the forgotten race, and it is from him that most of my information is derived. He told me about that unlucky lad," pointing to the younger boy. "He was in the navy,

distinguished himself out in China, and was on the high road to getting a ship when he got broke for drunkenness—a flagrant case, which all but ended in a tremendous disaster and the burning of a man-of-war. He went into the merchant service—did well for a year or two, and then the old enemy took hold of him again, and he got broke *there*. After that he dropped through—disappeared in the great dismal swamp where the men who fail in this world sink out of knowledge."

"And the elder boy; what became of him?"

"He was in the army—a tremendous swell, I believe, married Lord Dangerfield's youngest daughter, and cut a dash for two or three years, and then disappeared from society, and took his wife to Corsica, on the ground of delicate health. For anything I know to the contrary they may still be living in that free-and-easy little island. He was fond of sport, and liked a rough life. I fancy that Ajaccio would suit him better than Purbeck or Pall Mall."

"Poor things; I wonder if they ever long for Cheriton?"

"If old Jasper is to be believed, they were passionately fond of the place, especially that girl. Jasper was groom in those days, and he taught her to ride. She was a regular dare devil, according to his account, with a temper that no one had ever been able to control. But she seems to have behaved pretty well to Jasper, and he was attached to her. Her father couldn't manage her anyhow. They were too much alike. He sent her to a school at Lausanne soon after that picture was painted, and she never came back to Cheriton. She ran away with an English officer who was home from India on furlough, and was staying at Ouchy for his health. She represented herself as of full age, and contrived to get married at Geneva. The squire refused ever to see her or her husband. She ran away from the husband afterwards, as I told you. In fact, to quote Jasper, she was an incorrigible bolter."

"Poor, poor thing. It is all too sad," sighed Juanita. "Let us go into the library and forget them. There are no Strangways there, thank Heaven."

She put her arm through Godfrey's and led him off, unresisting. He was in that stage of devotion in which he followed her like a dog.

The library was one of the best rooms in the house, but the least interesting from an archæologist's point of view. It had been built early in the eighteenth century for a ballroom, a long narrow room, with five tall windows, and it had been afterwards known as the music room; but James Dalbrook had improved it out of its original character by throwing out a large bay, with three windows opening on to a semicircular terrace, with marble balustrade and steps leading down to the prettiest portion of that Italian garden which was the crowning glory of Cheriton Manor, and which it had been Lord Cheriton's delight to improve. The spacious bay gave width and dignity to the room, and it was in the space between the bay and the fireplace that people naturally grouped themselves. It was too large a room to be warmed by one fire of ordinary dimensions, but the fireplace added by James Dalbrook was of abnormal width and grandeur, while the chimney-piece was rich in

coloured marbles and massive sculpture. The room was lined with books from floor to ceiling. Clusters of wax candles were burning on the mantelpiece, and two large moderator lamps stood on a massive carved oak table in the centre of the room —a table spacious enough to hold all the magazines, reviews, and periodicals in three languages that were worth reading—Quarterlies, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, *Rundschau*, *Figaro*, *World*, *Saturday*, *Truth*, and the rest of them—as well as guide books, peerages, clergy and army lists—which made a formidable range in the middle.

Godfrey flung himself into a long, low, arm-chair, and Juanita perched herself lightly beside him on the cushioned arm, looking down at him from that point of vantage. There was a wood fire here as well as in the hall; but the rain was over now, the evening had grown warmer, and the French windows in the bay stood open to the dull grey night.

"What are you reading now, Godfrey?" asked Juanita, glancing at the cosy double table in a corner by the chimney-piece, loaded with books above and below.

"For duty reading Jones' book on 'Grattan and the Irish Parliament;' for old books 'Plato;' for new 'Wider Horizons.'"

He was an insatiable reader, and even in those long summer days of honeymoon bliss he had felt the need of books, which were a habit of his life.

"Is 'Wider Horizons' a good book?"

"It is full of imagination, and it carries one away; but one has the same feeling as in 'Esoteric Buddhism.' It is a very comforting theory, and it ought to be true; but by what authority is this gospel preached to us, and on what evidence are we to believe?"

"'Wider Horizons' is about the life to come?"

"Yes; it gives us a very vivid picture of our existence in other planets. The author writes as if he had been there."

"And according to this theory you and I are to meet and be happy again in some distant star?"

"In many stars—climbing from star to star, and achieving a higher spirituality, a finer essence, with every new existence, until we attain the everlasting perfection."

"And we who are to die old and worn out here are to be young and bright again there—in our next world?"

"Naturally."

"And then we shall grow old again—go through the same slow decay—grey hairs, fading sight, duller hearing?"

"Yes; as we blossom so must we fade. The withered husk of the old life holds the seed from which the new flower must spring; and with every incarnation the flower is to gain in vigour and beauty, and the life period is to lengthen till it touches infinity."

"I must read the book, Godfrey. It may be all a dream; but I love even dreams that promise a future in which you and I shall always be together —as we are now, as we are now."

She repeated those last four words with infinite tenderness. The beautiful head sank down to nestle upon his shoulder, and they were silent for some minutes in a dreamy reverie, gazing into the fire, where the logs had given out their last flame, and were slowly fading from red to grey.

It was a quarter to eleven by the dial let into the marble of the chimney-piece. The butler had brought a tray with wine and water at ten o'clock, and had taken the final orders before retiring. Juanita and her husband were alone amid the stillness of the sleeping household. The night was close and dull, not a leaf stirring, and only a few dim stars in the heavy sky.

As the clock told the third quarter with a small silvery chime, as if it were a town clock in fairy-land, Juanita started suddenly from her half reclining position, and listened intently, with her face towards the open window.

"A footstep!" she exclaimed. "I heard a footstep on the terrace."

"My dearest, I know your hearing is quicker than mine; but this time it is your fancy that heard and not your ears. I heard nothing. And who should be walking on the terrace at such an hour, do you suppose?"

"I don't suppose anything about it, but I know there was some one. I heard the steps, Godfrey. I heard them as distinctly as I heard you speak just

now; light footsteps—slow, very slow, and with that cautious, treacherous sound which light, slow footsteps always have, if one hears them in the silence of night."

"You are very positive."

"I know it, I heard it!" she cried, running to the window, and out into the grey night.

She ran along the whole length of the terrace and back again, her husband following her with slower steps, and they found no one, heard nothing from one end to the other.

"You see, love, there was no one there," said Godfrey.

"I see nothing of the kind—only that the some one who was there has vanished very cleverly. An eavesdropper might hide easily enough behind any one of those cypresses," she said, pointing to the obelisk-shaped trees which showed black against the dim grey of the night.

"Why should there be any eavesdropper, love? What secrets have you and I that any prowler should care to watch or listen. The only person of the prowling kind to be apprehended would be a

and how sweet it used to be to go over all your dearest words—over and over again—and no doubt the heart of a housemaid is worked by just the same machinery that sets mine going—and her thoughts would follow the same track."

"That is what we are taught to believe, dearest, in this enlightened age."

"Why should it be a ghost?" pursued Juanita, leaning back in her bamboo chair, and lazily enjoying the summer morning, somewhat languid after a sleepless night.

They were breakfasting at the western end of the terrace, with an awning over their heads, and a couple of footmen travelling to and from the house in attendance upon them, and keeping respectfully out of earshot between whiles. The table was heaped with roses, and the waxen chalices of a great magnolia on the lower level showed above the marble balustrade, and shed an almost overpowering perfume on the warm air.

"Why should a ghost come now?" she asked, harping upon her morbid fancies. "There has never been a hint of a ghost in all the years that

father and mother have lived here. Why should one come now, unless——"

"Unless what, love?"

"Unless one of the Strangways died last night—at the very moment when we heard the footfall—died in some distant land, perhaps, and with his last dying thought revisited the place of his birth. One has heard of such things."

"One has heard of a great many strange things. The human imagination is very inventive."

"Ah, you are a sceptic, I know. I don't think I actually believe in ghosts—but I am afraid of being forced to believe in them. Oh, Godfrey, if it were meant for a warning," she cried, with sudden terror in the large dark eyes.

"What kind of warning?"

"A presage of misfortune—sickness—death. I have read so many stories of such warnings."

"My dearest love, you have read too much rubbish in that line. Your mind is full of morbid fancies. If the morning were not too warm, I should say put on your habit and let us go for a

long ride. I am afraid this sauntering life of ours is too depressing for you."

"Depressing—to be with you all day! Oh, Godfrey, *you* must be tired of *me* if you can suggest such a thing."

"But, my Nita, when I see you giving yourself up to gloomy speculations about ghosts and omens."

"Oh, that means nothing. When one has a very precious treasure one must needs be full of fears. Look at misers; how nervous they are about their hidden gold. And my treasure is more to me than all the gold of Ophir—infinitely precious."

She sprang up from her low chair, and leaned over the back of his to kiss the broad brow which was lifted up to meet those clinging lips.

"Oh, my love, my love, I never knew what fear meant till I knew the fear of parting from you," she murmured.

"Put on you habit, Nita. We will go for a ride in spite of the sun. Or what do you say to driving to Dorchester, and storming your cousins for a lunch? I want to talk to Mr. Dalbrook about Skinner's bill of dilapidations."

Her mood changed in an instant.

"That would be capital fun," she cried. "I wonder if it is a breach of etiquette to lunch with one's cousins during one's honeymoon?"

"A fig for etiquette. Thomas," to an approaching footman, "order the phaeton for half-past eleven."

"What a happy idea," said Juanita, "a long, long drive with you, and then the fun of seeing how you get on with my strong-minded cousins. They pretend to despise everything that other girls care for, don't you know—and go in for literature, science, politics, everything intellectual, in short—and I have seen them sit and nurse Darwin or Buckle for a whole evening, while they have talked of gowns and bonnets and other girls' flirtations."

"Then they are not such Roman maidens as they affect to be."

"Far from it. They will take the pattern of my frock with their eyes before I have been in the room ten minutes. Just watch them."

"I will; if I can take my eyes off you."

Juanita ran away to change her white peignoir for

a walking dress, and reappeared in half an hour radiant and ready for the drive.

"How do you like my frock?" she asked, posing herself in front of her husband, and challenging admiration.

The frock was old gold Indian silk, soft and dull, made with an exquisite simplicity of long flowing draperies, over a kilted petticoat which just showed the neat little tan shoes, and a glimpse of tan silk stocking. The bodice fitted the tall supple figure like a glove; the sleeves were loose and short, tied carelessly at the elbow with a broad satin ribbon, and the long suéde gloves matched the gown to the nicest shade. Her hat was Leghorn, broad enough to shade her eyes from the sun, high enough to add to her importance, and caught up on one side with a bunch of dull yellow barley and a few cornflowers, whose vivid hue was repeated in a cluster of the same flowers embroidered on one side of the bodice. Her large sunshade was of the same silk as her gown, and that was also embroidered with cornflowers, a stray blossom flung here and there with an accidental air.

"My love, you look as if you had stepped out of a fashion book."

"I suppose I am too smart," said Juanita with an impatient sigh; "and yet my colouring is very subdued. There is only that touch of blue in the cornflowers—just the one high light in the picture. That is the only drawback to country life. Everything really pretty seems too smart for dusty roads and green lanes. One must be content to grope one's obscure way in a tailor gown or a cotton frock all the year round. Now this would be perfection for a Wednesday in Hyde Park, wouldn't it?"

"My darling, it is charming. Why should you not be prettily dressed under this blue summer sky? You can sport your tailor gowns in winter. You are not too smart for me, Nita. You are only too lovely. Bring your dust cloak, and you may defy the perils of the road."

Celestine, Lady Carmichael's French-Swiss maid, was in attendance with the dust cloak, an ample wrap of creamy silk and lace, cloudlike, indescribable. This muffled the pretty gown from top to toe, and Nita took her seat in the phaeton, and prepared for

a longer drive and a longer talk than they had had yesterday.

She was pleased at the idea of showing off her handsome young husband and her new frock to those advanced young ladies, who had affected a kind of superiority on the ground of what she called "heavy reading," and what they called advanced views. Janet and Sophia had accepted Lady Cheriton's invitations with inward protest, and in their apprehension of being patronized had been somewhat inclined to give themselves airs, taking pains to impress upon their cousin that she was as empty-headed as she was beautiful, and that they stood upon an intellectual plane for which she had no scaling ladder. She had put up with such small snubbings in the sweetest way, knowing all the time that as the Honorable Juanita Dalbrook, of Cheriton Chase, and one of the débutantes whose praises had been sung in all the society papers, she inhabited a social plane as far beyond their reach as their intellectual plane might be above hers.

"I don't suppose we shall see Theodore," said Juanita, as the bays bowled merrily along the level road.

The greys were getting a rest after yesterday's work, and these were Lady Cheriton's famous barouche horses, to whom the phaeton seemed a toy.

"He must have gone to Heidelberg before now," added Juanita.

"He must be fond of Heidelberg to be running off there when it is so jolly at home."

"He was there for a year, you know, before he went to Cambridge, and he is always going back there or to the Hartz for his holidays. I sometimes tell him he is half a German."

She rather hoped that Theodore was in Germany by this time; and yet she had assured herself in her own mind that there could be no pain to him in their meeting. She knew that he had loved her—that in one rash hour, after a year's absence in America, when he had not known, or had chosen to forget, the state of affairs between her and Godfrey, he had told her of his love, and had asked her to give him hope. It was before her engagement; but she was not the less frank in confessing her attachment to Godfrey. "I can never care for anyone else," she said; "I have loved him all my life."

All her life! Yes, that was Theodore's irreparable loss. While he, the working man, had been grinding out his days in the treadmill round of a country solicitor's office, the young patrician had been as free as the butterflies in Juanita's rose garden; free to woo her all day long, free to share her most trifling pleasures and sympathize with her lightest pains. What chance had the junior partner in Dalbrook & Son against Sir Godfrey Carmichael of Milbrook Priory?

Theodore had managed his life so well after that one bitter rebuff that Juanita had a right to suppose that his wound had healed, and that the pain of that hour had been forgotten. She was sincerely attached to him, as a kinsman, and respected him more than any other young man of her acquaintance. Had not Lord Cheriton, that admirable judge of character, declared that Theodore was one of the cleverest men he knew, and regretted that he had not attached himself to the higher branch of the law, as the more likely in his case to result in wealth and fame?

The phaeton drove up to the old Hanoverian doorway as St. Peter's clock chimed the quarter

after one. The old man-servant looked surprised at this brilliant vision of a beautiful girl, a fine pair of horses, a smart groom, and Sir Godfrey Carmichael. The *tout-ensemble* was almost bewildering even to a man accustomed to see the various conveyances of neighbouring landowners at his master's door.

"Yes, my lady, both the young ladies are at home," said Brown, and led the way upstairs with unshaken dignity.

He had lived in that house five-and-thirty years, beginning as shoe-black and errand boy, and he was proud to hear his master tell his friends how he had risen from the ranks. He had indulged in some mild philanderings with pretty parlour-maids in the days of his youth, but had never seriously entangled himself, and was a confirmed bachelor, and something of a misogynist. He was a pattern of honesty and conscientiousness, having no wife and family to be maintained upon broken victuals and illuminated with filched candle-ends or stolen oil. He had not a single interest outside his master's house, hardly so much as a thought; and the glory and honour of "family" were his honour and glory. So as he

ushered Lady Carmichael and her husband to the drawing-room he was meditating upon what additions to the luncheon he could suggest to cook which might render that meal worthy of such distinguished guests.

Sophia was seated by one of the windows painting an orchid in a tall Venetian vase. It was a weakness with these clever girls to think they could do everything. They were not content with Darwin and the new learning, but they painted indifferently in oils and in water colours, played on various instruments, sang in three languages, and fancied themselves invincible at lawn tennis.

The orchid was top-heavy, and had been tumbling out of the vase every five minutes in a manner that had been very trying to the artist's temper, and irritating to Janet, who was grappling with a volume of Johann Müller, in the original, and losing herself in a labyrinth of words beginning with *ver* and ending with *heit*.

They both started up from occupations of which both were tired, and welcomed their visitors with a show of genuine pleasure; for although they had

been very determined in their resistance to anything like patronage on Juanita's part when she was Miss Dalbrook they were glad that she should be prompt to recognize the claims of kindred now that she was Lady Carmichael.

"How good of you to come," exclaimed Janet, "I didn't think you would remember us, at such a time."

"Did you think I must forget old friends because I am happy?" said Juanita. "But I mustn't take credit for other people's virtues. It was Godfrey who proposed driving over to see you."

"I wanted to show you what a nice couple we make," said Sir Godfrey, gaily, drawing his bride closer to him, as they stood side by side, tall and straight, and glowing with youth and gladness, in the middle of the grave old drawing-room. "You young ladies were not so cousinly as your brother Theodore. *You* didn't drive to Cheriton to welcome us home."

"If Theo had told us what he was going to do we should have been very glad to be there too," replied Sophy, "but he rode off in the morning without saying a word to anybody."

"He is in Germany by this time, I suppose?" said Juanita.

"He is downstairs in the office. His portmanteau has been packed for a week, I believe," explained Janet, "but there is always some fresh business to prevent his starting. My father relies upon him more every day."

"Dear, good Theodore, he is quite the cleverest man I know," said Juanita, without the slightest idea of disparaging her husband, whom she considered perfection. "I think he must be very much like what my father was at his age."

"People who are in a position to know tell us that he is exactly what his *own* father was at that age," said Janet, resenting this attempt to trace her brother's gifts to a more distant source. "I don't see why one need go further. My father would not have been trusted as he has been for the last thirty years if he were a simpleton; and Galton observes ——"

The door opened at this moment and Theodore came in.

He greeted his cousin and his cousin's husband with unaffected friendliness.

"It is against my principles to take luncheon," he said, laughingly, as he gave Juanita his hand, "but this is a red-letter day. My father is waiting for us in the dining-room."

They all went down stairs together, Theodore leading the way with his cousin, talking gaily as they went down the wide oak staircase, between sober panelled walls of darkest brown. The front part of the ground floor was given up to offices, and the dining-room was built out at the back, a large bright-looking room with a bay window, opening on to a square town garden, a garden of about half an acre, surrounded with high walls, above which showed the treetops in one of the leafy walks that skirt the town. It was very different to that Italian garden at Cheriton where the peacocks strutted slowly between long rows of cypresses, where the Italian statues showed white in every angle of the dense green wall, and where the fountain rose and fell with a silvery cadence in the still summer atmosphere. Here there was only a square lawn, just big enough for a tennis

court, and a broad border of hardy flowers, with one especial portion at the end of the garden, where Sophia experimented in cross fertilisation after the manner of Darwin, seeming for ever upon the threshold of valuable discoveries.

Mr. Dalbrook was a fine-looking man of some unascertained age between fifty and sixty. He boasted that he was Lord Cheriton's junior by a year or two, although they had both come to a time of life when a year or two more or less could matter very little.

He was very fond of Juanita, and he welcomed her with especial tenderness in her new character as a bride. He kissed her, and then held her away from him for a minute, with a kindly scrutiny.

"Lady Godfrey surpasses Miss Dalbrook," he said, smiling at the girl's radiant face. "I suppose now you are going to be the leading personage in our part of the county. We quiet townspeople will be continually hearing of you, and there will not be a local paper without a notice of your doings. Anyhow I am glad you don't forget old friends."

He placed her beside him at the large oval table,

on which the handsomest plate and the oldest china had been set forth with a celerity which testified to Brown's devotion. Mr. Dalbrook was one of those sensible people who never waste keep or wages upon a bad horse or a bad servant, whereby his cook was one of the best in Dorchester; so the luncheon, albeit plain and unpretentious, was a meal of which no man need feel ashamed.

Juanita was fond of her uncle, as she called this distant cousin of hers, to distinguish him from the younger generation, and she was pleased to be sitting by him, and hearing all the news of the county town and the county people who were his clients, and in many cases his friends. It may be that his cousinship with Lord Cheriton had gone as far as his professional acumen to elevate him in the esteem of town and county, and that some people who would hardly have invited the provincial solicitor for his own sake, sent their cards as a matter of course to the law lord's cousin. But there were others who esteemed Matthew Dalbrook for his own sterling qualities, and who even liked him better than the somewhat severe and self-assertive Lord Cheriton.

While Juanita talked confidentially to her kinsman, and while Sir Godfrey discussed the latest theory about the sun, and the probable endurance of our own little planet, with Janet and Sophia, Theodore sat at the bottom of the table, silent and thoughtful, watching the lovely animated face with its look of radiant happiness, and telling himself that the woman he loved was as far away from him sitting there, within reach of his touch, within the sound of his lowest whisper, as if she had been in another world. He had borne himself bravely on her wedding-day, and smiled back her happy smile, and clasped her hand with the steady grip of friendship; but after that ordeal there had been a sad relapse in his fortitude, and he had thought of her ever since as a man thinks of that supreme possession without which life is worthless—as the miser thinks of his stolen gold—or the ambitious man of his blighted name.

Yes, he had loved her with all the strength of his heart and mind, and he knew that he could never again love with the same full measure. He was too wise a man, and too experienced in life, to tell him-

self that for him time could have no healing power—that no other woman could ever be dear to him; but he told himself that another love like unto this was impossible, and that all the future could bring him would be some pale faint copy of this radiant picture.

"I suppose it's only one man in fifty who marries his first love," he thought, and then he looked at Godfrey Carmichael and thought that to him over much had been given. He was a fine young fellow, clever, unassuming, with a frank good face; a man who was liked by men as well as by women; but what had he done to be worthy of such a wife as Juanita? Theodore could only answer the question in the words of Figaro, "He had taken the trouble to be born."

That one thoughtful guest made no difference in the gaiety of the luncheon table. Matthew Dalbrook had plenty to say to his beautiful cousin, and Juanita had all the experiences of the last season to talk about, while once having started upon Sir William Thomson and the ultimate exhaustion of the sun's heat, the sisters were not likely to stop.

CHAPTER V.

"Poor little life that toddles half an hour,
Crowned with a flower or two, and there an end—"

Sir Godfrey's device for diverting his wife's mind from the morbid fancies of the previous night answered admirably. She left Dorchester in high spirits, after having invited her cousins to Cheriton for tennis and lunch on the following day, and after having bade an affectionate good-bye to Theodore, who was to start on his holiday directly he could make an end of some important business now in hand. His father told him laughingly that he might have gone a week earlier had he really wanted to go.

"I believe there must be some attraction for you in Dorchester, though I am not clever enough to find out what it is," said Mr. Dalbrook, innocently, "for you have been talking about going away for the last fortnight, and yet you don't go."

Lady Carmichael had lingered in the homely old house till afternoon tea, had lingered over her tea, telling her cousins all they wanted to know about smart society in London, that one central spot of bright white light in the dull, grey mass of a busy, common-place world, of which she knew so much, and of which they knew so little. Janet and Sophia professed to be above caring for these things, except from a purely philosophical point of view, as they cared for ants, bees, and wasps; but they listened eagerly all the same, with occasional expressions of wonder that human beings could be so trivial.

"Five hundred pounds spent in flowers at Lady Drumlock's ball!" cried Sophy, "and to think that in a few more million years the sun may be as cold as the north pole, and what trace will there be then of all this butterfly world?"

"Did the Mountains cut a tremendous dash this season?" asked Janet, frivolously curious about their immediate neighbours, county people who went to London for the season. "Of course you know she had thirty thousand pounds left her by an uncle quite lately. And she is so utterly without brains

that I daresay she will spend it all in entertainments."

"Oh, they did entertain a good deal, and they did their best, poor things, and people went to them," Juanita answered, with a deprecating air; "but still I should hardly like to say that they are *in* society. In the first place, she has never succeeded in getting the Prince at any of her dances; and in the next place, her parties have a cloud of provincial dulness upon them, against which it is in vain to struggle. He can never forget his constituents and his duty to his borough, and that kind of thing does not answer if one wants to give really nice parties. I'm afraid her legacy won't do her much good, poor soul, unless she gets some clever person to show her how to spend it. There is a kind of society instinct, don't you know, and she is without it. I believe the people who give good parties are born, not made—like poets and orators."

Sir Godfrey looked down at her, smiling at her juvenile arrogance, which, to his mind, was more bewitching than another woman's humility.

"We mean to show them the way next year, if we take a house in town," he said.

"But we are not going to have a house in town," answered Juanita, quickly. "Why, Godfrey, you know I have done with all that kind of frivolity. We can go to Victoria-street in May, and stay with our people there long enough to see all the pictures and hear some good music, and just rub shoulders with the friends we like at half-a-dozen parties, and then we will go back to our nest at the Priory. Do you think that I am like Lady Mountain, and want to waste my life upon the society struggle, when I have *you?*"

It was after five o'clock when they left Dorchester. It was more than half-past seven when they drew near Cheriton, and the sun was setting behind the irregular line of hills towards Studland. They approached the Manor by one of the most picturesque lanes in the district, a lane sunk between high banks, rugged and rocky, and with here and there a massive trunk of beech or oak jutting out above the roadway, while the gnarled and twisted roots spread over the rough, shelving ground, and seemed to hold up the

meadow-land upon the higher level; a dark, secret-looking lane it must have seemed on a moonless night, sunk so deeply between those earth walls, and overshadowed by those gigantic trunks and interlacing branches; but in this mellow evening light it was a place in which to linger. There was a right of way through Cheriton Chase, and this sunk lane was the favourite approach. A broad carriage drive crossed the Chase and park, skirted the great elm avenue that led to the house, and swept round by a wide semi-circle to the great iron gates which opened on the high road from Wareham.

The steep gable ends of an old English cottage rose amidst the trees, on the upper ground just outside the gate at the end of the lane. It was a veritable old English cottage, and had been standing at that corner of the park-like meadow for more than two hundred years, and had known but little change during those two centuries. It was a good deal larger than the generality of lodges, and it differed from other lodges insomuch as it stood outside the gate instead of inside, and on a higher level than the road; but it was a lodge all the same, and the duty

of the person who lived in it was to open the gate of Cheriton Chase to all comers, provided they came in such vehicles as were privileged to enjoy the right of way. There was a line drawn somewhere ; perhaps at coal waggons or tradesmen's carts ; but for the generality of vehicles the carriage road across Cheriton Chase was free.

A rosy-faced girl of about fourteen came tripping down the stone steps built into the bank as the carriage approached, and was curtseying at the open gate in time for Sir Godfrey to drive through without slackening the pace. He gave her a friendly nod as he passed.

" Does Mrs. Porter never condescend to open the gate herself ? " he asked Juanita.

" Seldom for anyone except my father. I think she makes a point of doing it for him, though I believe he would much rather she didn't. You mustn't sneer at her, Godfrey. She is a very unassuming person, and very grateful for her comfortable position here, though she has known better days, poor soul."

" That is always such a vague expression. What were the better days like ? "

"She is the widow of a captain—in the mercantile marine, I think it is called—a man who was almost a gentleman. She was left very poor, and my father, who knew her husband, gave her the lodge to take care of, and a tiny pension—not so much as I spend upon gloves and shoes, I'm afraid; and she has lived here contentedly and gratefully for the last ten years. It must be a sadly dull life, for she is an intellectual woman, too refined to associate with upper servants and village tradespeople; so she has no one to talk to—literally no one—except when the Vicar, or any of us call upon her. But that is not the worst, poor thing," pursued Juanita, dropping her voice to a subdued and sorrowful tone; "she had a great trouble some years ago. You remember, don't you, Godfrey?"

"I blush to say that Mrs. Porter's trouble has escaped my memory."

"Oh, you have been so much away; you would hardly hear anything about it, perhaps. She had an only daughter—her only child—a very handsome girl, whom she had educated most carefully; and the girl went wrong, and disappeared. I never heard

the circumstances. I was not supposed to know, but I know she vanished suddenly, and that there was a good deal of fuss with mother and the servants, and the Vicar; and Mrs. Porter's hair began to whiten from that time, and people who had not cared much for her before were so sorry that they grew quite fond of her."

"It is a common story enough," said Godfrey, "what could a handsome girl do—except go wrong—in such a life as that. Did she open the gate while she was here?"

"Only for my father, I believe. Mrs. Porter has always contrived to keep a girl in a pinafore, like that girl you saw just now. All the girls come from the same family, or have done for the last six or seven years. As soon as the girl grows out of pinafores she goes off to some better service, and a younger sister drops into her place."

"And her pinafores, I suppose."

"Mrs. Porter's girls always do well. She has a reputation for making a good servant out of the raw material."

"A clever woman, no doubt; very clever, to have

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secured a lodge-keeper's berth without being obliged to open the gate; a woman who knows how to take care of herself."

"You ought not to disparage her, Godfrey. The poor thing has known so much trouble—think of what it was to lose the daughter she loved—and in such a way—worse than death."

"I don't know about that. Death means the end. A loving mother might rather keep the sinner than lose the saint, and the sinner may wash herself clean and become a saint—after the order of Mary Magdalene. If this Mrs. Porter had been really devoted to her daughter she would have followed her and brought her back to the fold. She would not be here, leading a life of genteel idleness in that picturesque old cottage while the lost sheep is still astray in the wilderness."

"You are very hard upon her, Godfrey."

"I am hard upon all shams and pretences. I have not spoken to Mrs. Porter above half-a-dozen times in my life—she never opens the gate for me, you know—but I have a fixed impression that she is a hypocrite—a harmless hypocrite, perhaps—one

of those women whose chief object in life is to stand well with the Vicar of her parish."

They were at the hall door by this time, and it was a quarter to eight.

"Let us sit in the drawing-room this evening, Godfrey," said Juanita, as she ran off to dress for dinner. "The library would give me the horrors after last night."

"My capricious one. You will be tired of the drawing-room to-morrow. I should not be surprised if you ordered me to sit on the housetop. We might rig up a tent for afternoon tea between two chimney stacks."

Juanita made a rapid toilet, and appeared in one of her graceful cream white tea gowns, veiled in a cloud of softest lace, just as the clocks were striking eight. She was all gaiety to-night, just as she had been all morbid apprehension last night; and when they went to the drawing-room after dinner—together, for it was not to be supposed that Sir Godfrey would linger over a solitary glass of claret—she flew to the grand piano and began to play Tito Mattei's famous waltz, which seemed the most con-

summate expression of joyousness possible to her. The brilliant music filled the atmosphere with gaiety, while the face of the player, turned to her husband as she played, harmonized with the light-hearted melody.

The drawing-room was as frivolously pretty as the library was soberly grand. It was Lady Cheriton's taste which had ruled here, and the room was a kind of record of her ladyship's travels. She had bought pretty things, or curious things wherever they took her fancy, and had brought them home to her Cheriton drawing-room. Thus the walls were hung with Algerian embroideries on damask or satin, and decorated with Rhodian pottery. The furniture was a mixture of old French and old Italian. The Dresden tea services and ivory statuettes, and *capo di monte* vases, and Copenhagen figures, had been picked up all over the Continent, without any regard to their combined effect; but there were so many things that the ultimate result was delightful, the room being spacious enough to hold everything without the slightest appearance of over-crowding.

The piano stood in a central position, and was draped with a Japanese robe of state—a mass of rainbow-hued embroidery on a ground of violet satin almost covered with gold thread. It was the most gorgeous fabric Godfrey Carmichael had ever seen, and it made the piano a spot of vivid parti-coloured light, amidst the more subdued colouring of the room—the silvery silken curtains, the delicate Indian muslin draperies, and the dull tawny plush coverings of sofas and chairs.

The room was lighted only by clusters of wax candles, and a reading lamp on a small table near one of the windows. It was a rule that wherever Sir Godfrey spent his evening there must always be a reading table and lamp ready for him.

He showed no eagerness for his books yet awhile, but seemed completely happy lolling at full length on a sofa near the piano listening and watching as Juanita played. She played more of Mattei's brilliant music—another waltz—an arrangement of *Non c'ver*—and then dashed into one of Chopin's wildest mazurkas, with an audacious self-abandonment that was almost genius.

Godfrey listened rapturously, delighted with the music for its own sake, but even more delighted for the gladness which it expressed.

She stopped at last, breathless, after Mendelssohn's Capriccio. Godfrey had risen from the sofa and was standing by her side.

"I'm afraid I must have tired you to death," she said, "but I had a strange sort of feeling that I must go on playing. That music was a safety valve for my high spirits."

"My darling, I am so glad to see that you have done with imaginary woes. We may have real troubles of some kind to face by-and-by, perhaps, as we go down the hill, so it would be very foolish to abandon ourselves to fancied sorrows while we are on the top."

"Real troubles—yes—sickness, anxiety, the fear of parting," said Juanita, in a troubled voice. "Oh, Godfrey, if we were to give half our fortune to the poor—if we were to make some great sacrifice—do you think God would spare us such pangs as these—the fear—the horrible fear of being parted from each other?"

"My dearest, we cannot make a bargain with Providence. We can only do our duty, and hope for the best."

"At any rate, let us be very—very good to the poor," urged Juanita, with intense earnestness, "let us have their prayers to plead for us."

The night was warm and still, and the windows were all open to the terrace. Godfrey and Juanita took their coffee in their favourite corner by the magnolia tree, and sat there for a long time in the soft light of the stars, talking the old sweet talk of their future life.

"We must drive to Swanage and see Lady Jane to-morrow," said Juanita by-and-by. "Don't you think it was very wrong to go to see my people—only cousins after all—before we went to your mother?"

"She will come to us, dear, directly we give her permission. I know she is dying to see you in your new character."

"How lovely she looked at the wedding, in her pale grey gown and bonnet. I love her almost as well as I love my own dear, good, indulgent mother, and I think she is the most perfect lady I ever met."

"I don't think you'll find her very much like the typical mother-in-law, at any rate," replied Godfrey, gaily.

They decided on driving to Swanage next morning. They would go in the landau, and bring "the mother" back with them for a day or two, if she could be persuaded to come.

Juanita stifled a yawn presently, and seemed somewhat languid after her sleepless night and long day of talk and vivacity.

"I am getting very stupid company," she said. "I'll go to bed early to-night, Godfrey, and leave you an hour's quiet with 'Wider Horizons.' I know you are longing to go on with that book, but your chatter-box wife won't let you."

Of course he protested that her society was worth more than all the books in the British Museum. He offered to take his book up to her room and read her to sleep, if she liked; but she would not have it so.

"You shall have your own quiet corner and your books, just as if you were still a bachelor," she said, caressingly, as she hung upon his shoulder for a good-night kiss. "As for me, I am utterly tired

out. Janet and Sophy talked me to death; and then there was the long drive home. I shall be as fresh as ever to-morrow morning, and ready to be off to dear Lady Jane."

He went into the hall with her, and to the top of the stairs for the privilege of carrying her candlestick, and he only left her at the end of the corridor out of which her room opened.

She did not ring for her maid, preferring solitude to that young person's attendance. She did not want to be worried with elaborate hair-brushing or ceremonies of any kind. She was thoroughly exhausted with the alternations of emotion of which her life had been made up of late, and she fell asleep almost as soon as her head touched her pillow.

The bedroom was over the drawing-room. Her last look from the open casement had shown her the reflection of the lights below on the terrace. She was near enough to have spoken out of the window to her husband, had she been so minded. She could picture him sitting at the table at the corner window, in his thoughtful attitude, his head bent over his book, one knee drawn up nearly to his chin, one

arm hanging loosely across the arm of his low, easy chair. She had watched him thus many a time, completely absorbed in his book.

She slept as tranquilly as an infant, and her dream-wanderings were all in pleasant places; with him; always with him; confused after the manner of all dreams, but with no sign of trouble.

What was this dream about being with him at Woolwich where they were firing a big gun? A curious dream! She had been there once with her father to see a gun drawn—but she had never seen one fired there—and now in her dream she stood in a crowd of strange faces, fronting the river, and there was a long grey ironclad on the water—a turret ship—and there came a flash, and then a puff of white smoke, and the report of a gun, short and sharp, not like the roar of a cannon by any means, and yet her dream showed her the dark sullen gun on the grey deck, the biggest gun she had ever seen.

She started up from her pillow, cold and trembling. That report of the gun had seemed so real and so near, that it had awakened her. She was wide awake now, and pushed back her loose hair

from her eyes, and felt under her pillow for her watch, and looked at it in the dim light of the night-lamp on the table by her bed.

"A quarter to one."

She had left the drawing-room a few minutes after ten. It was long for Godfrey to have sat reading alone; but he was insatiable when he had a new book that interested him.

She got up and put on her slippers and dressing-gown, prepared to take him to task for his late hours. She was not alarmed by her dream, but the sound of that sharp report was still in her ears as she lighted her candle and went down into the silent house.

She opened the drawing-room door, and looked across to the spot where she expected to see her husband sitting. His chair was empty. The lamp was burning just as she had left it hours ago, burning with a steady light under the green porcelain shade, but he was not there.

Puzzled, and with a touch of fear, she went slowly across the room towards his chair. He had strayed out on to the terrace perhaps—he had gone

out for a final smoke. She would steal after him in her long white gown, and frighten him if she could.

"He ought at least to take me for a ghost," she thought.

She stopped transfixed with a sudden horror. He was lying on the carpet at her feet in a huddled heap, just as he had rolled out of his chair. His head was bent forward between his shoulders, his face was hidden. She tried to lift his head, hanging over him, calling to him in passionate entreaty; and, behold, her hands and arms were drowned in blood. His blood splashed her white peignoir. It was all over her. She seemed to be steeped in it, as she sat on the floor trying to get a look at his face—to see if his wound was mortal.

For some moments she had no other thought than to sit there in her horror, repeating his name in every accent of terror and of love, beseeching him to answer her. Then gradually came the conviction of his unconsciousness, and of the need of help. He was badly hurt—dangerously hurt—but it might not be mortal. Help must be got. He must be

cured somehow. She could not believe that he was to die.

She rushed to the bell and rang again, and again, and again, hardly taking her finger from the little ivory knob, listening as the shrill electric peal vibrated through the silent house. It seemed an age before there was any response, and then three servants came hurrying in—the butler, and one of the footmen, and a scared housemaid. They saw her standing there, tall and white, dabbled with blood.

"Some one has been trying to murder him," she cried. "Didn't you hear a gun?"

No, no one had heard anything till they heard the bell. The two men lifted Sir Godfrey from the floor to the sofa, and did all they could do to staunch that deadly wound in his neck, from which the blood was still pouring—a bullet wound. Lambert, the butler, was afraid that the bullet had pierced the jugular vein.

If there was life still, it was only ebbing life. Juanita flung herself on the ground beside that prostrate form and kissed the unconscious lips, and the cold brow, and those pallid cheeks; kissed and

cried over him, and repeated again and again that the wound was not mortal.

"Is any one going for the doctor?" she cried, frantically. "Are you all going to stand still and see him die?"

Lambert assured her that Thomas was gone to the stable to wake the men, and despatch a mounted messenger for Mr. Dolby, the family doctor.

"He might have helped us more if he had run there himself," cried Juanita. "There will be time lost in waking the men, and saddling a horse. I could go there faster."

She looked at the door as if she had half resolved to rush off to the village in her dressing-gown and slippers. And then she looked again at that marble face, and again fell upon her knees by the sofa, and laid her cheek against that bloodless cheek, and moaned and cried over him; while the butler went to get brandy, with but little hope in his own mind of any useful result.

"What an end to a honeymoon," he said to himself despondently.

CHAPTER VI.

"Is not short payne well borne that bringes long ease,
And layes the soule to sleepe in quiet grave?
Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,
Ease after warre, death after life . . . ."

The morning dawned upon a weeping household. There was nothing to be done when Mr. Dolby, the village surgeon, arrived at Cheriton House. He could only examine the death-wound and express his opinion as to its character.

"It was certainly not self-inflicted," he told the servants, as they stood about him in a stony group.

"Self-inflicted, indeed!" echoed Lambert, "I should think not. If ever there was a young man who had cause to set store by his life it was Sir Godfrey Carmichael. It's murder, Mr. Dolby, rank murder."

"Yes, I'm afraid it's murder," said Dolby, with an air which implied that suicide would have been a bagatelle in comparison.

"But who can have done it, and why?" he asked after a pause.

The servants inclined to the opinion that it was the act of a poacher. Lord Cheriton had always been what they called a mark upon poachers. There was doubtless a vendetta to which the pheasant snaring fraternity had pledged themselves, and Sir Godfrey was the victim of that vendetta; however strange it might appear that hatred of Lord Cheriton should find its expression in the murder of Lord Cheriton's son-in-law.

"We must wait for the inquest before we can know anything," said Dolby, when he had done all that surgery could do for that cold clay, which was to compose the lifeless form in its final rest in a spare bedroom at the end of the corridor, remote from that bridal chamber where Juanita was lying motionless in her dumb despair.

The local policeman was on the scene at seven o'clock, prowling about the house with a countenance of solemn stolidity, and asking questions which seemed to have very little direct bearing on the case, and taking measurements between the spot

where the murdered man had been found, too plainly marked by the pool of blood which had soaked into the velvet pile, and imaginary points upon the terrace outside, with the doctor at his elbow to make suggestions, and as far as in him lay behaving as a skilled London detective might have behaved under the same circumstances, which conduct on his part did not prevent Mr. Dolby telegraphing to Scotland Yard as soon as the wires were at his disposal.

He was in the village post-office when the clock struck eight, and the post-mistress, who had hung out a flag and decorated her shop front with garlands on the wedding day, was watching him with an awe-stricken countenance as he wrote his telegrams.

The first was to Scotland Yard :—

"Sir Godfrey Carmichael murdered late last night. Send one of your most trustworthy men to investigate."

The second was to Lord Cheriton, Grand Hotel, Paramé St. Malo, France :—

"Sir Godfrey Carmichael was murdered last night, between twelve and one o'clock. Murderer

unknown. Death instantaneous. Pray come immediately."

The third was to Matthew Dalbrook, more briefly announcing the murder.

He was going to send a fourth message to Lady Jane Carmichael, began to write her address, then thought better of it, and tore up the form.

"I'll drive over and tell her," he said to himself. "Poor soul, it will break her heart, let her learn it how she may. But it would be cruel to telegraph, all the same."

Every one at Cheriton knew that Lady Jane's affections were centred upon her only son. She had daughters, and she was very fond of them. They were both married, and had married well; but their homes lay far off, one in the Midlands, the other in the North of England, and although in each case there was a nursery full of grandchildren, neither the young married women nor the babies had ever filled Lady Jane's heart as her son had filled it.

And now Mr. Dolby had taken upon himself to go and tell this gentle widow that the light of her life was extinguished; that the son she adored had been

brutally and inexplicably murdered. It was a hard thing for any man to do; and Mr. Dolby was a warm-hearted man, with home ties of his own.

Before Mr. Dolby's gig was half-way to Swanage, his telegram had been delivered at Dorchester, and Matthew Dalbrook and his son were starting for Cheriton with a pair of horses in the solicitor's neat T cart, which was usually driven with one. Theodore drove, and father and son sat side by side in a dreary silence.

What could be said? The telegram told so little. They had speculated and wondered about it in brief broken sentences as they stood in the office fronting the sunny street, waiting for the carriage. They had asked each other if this ghastly thing could be; if it were not some mad metamorphose of words, some blunder of a telegraph clerk's, rather than a horrible reality.

Murdered—a man who had been sitting at their table, full of life and spirits, in the glow of youth, and health, and happiness, less than twenty-four hours ago! Murdered—a man who had never known what it was to have an enemy, who had been popular

with all classes! Had been! How awful to think of him as belonging to the past, he who yesterday looked forward to so radiant a future. And Theodore Dalbrook had envied him, as even the most generous of men must needs envy the winner in the race for love.

Could it be? Or if it were really true, how could it be? What manner of murderer? What motive for the murder? Where had it happened? On the highway—in the woody labyrinths of the Chase? And upon the mind of Theodore flashed the same idea which had suggested itself to the servants. It might be the work of a poacher whom Sir Godfrey had surprised during a late ramble. Yet a poacher must be hard bested before he resorts to murder, and Sir Godfrey—easy tempered and generous—was hardly the kind of man to take upon himself the functions of a gamekeeper, and give chase to any casual depredator. It was useless to wonder or to argue while the facts of the case were all unrevealed. It would be time to do that when they were at Cheriton. So the father and son sat in a dismal silence, save that now and again the elder man

sighed "Poor Juanita, my poor Juanita; and she was so happy yesterday."

Theodore winced at the words. Yes, she had been so happy, and he had despaired because of her happiness. The cup of gladness which had brimmed over for her had been to him a fountain of bitterness. It seemed to him as if he had never realized how fondly he loved her till he saw her by her husband's side, an embodiment of life's sunshine, innocently revealing her felicity in every look and word. It was so long since he had ceased to hope. He had even taught himself to think he was resigned to his fate, that he could live his life without her. But that delusion ceased yesterday, and he knew that she was dearer than she had ever been to him now that she was irrevocably lost. It was human nature, perhaps, to love her best when love was most hopeless.

They drove along the level road towards Cheriton, in the dewy freshness of the summer morning, by meadow and copse, by heath and cornfield, the skylarks carolling in the hot blue sky, the cornerake creaking inside the hedge, the chaffinch reiterating

his monotonous note, the jay screaming in the wood, all living creatures revelling in the cloudless summer. It was hard, awful, unsupportable, that he who was with them yesterday, who had driven along this road under the westering sun, was now cold clay, a subject for the coroner, a something to be hidden away in the family vault, and forgotten as soon as possible; for what does consolation mean except persuasion to forget?

Never had the way between Dorchester and Cheriton Chase looked lovelier than in this morning atmosphere; never had the cattle grouped themselves into more delightful pictures amidst those shallow waters which reflected the sky; never had the lights and shadows been fairer upon those level meadows and yonder broken hills. Theodore Dalbrook loved every bit of that familiar landscape; and even to-day, amidst the horror and wonder of his distracted thoughts, he had a dim sense of surrounding beauty, as of something seen in a dream. He could have hardly told where he was, or what the season was, or whether it was the morning or the evening light that was gilding the fields yonder.

The lowered blinds at Cheriton told only too surely that the ghastly announcement in the telegram was no clerical error. The face of the footman who opened the door was pale with distress. He conducted Mr. Dalbrook and his son to the library, where the butler appeared almost immediately to answer the elder man's eager questions.

Not on the highway, not in the woods or the Park, but in the drawing-room where the butler had seen him sitting in a low arm-chair by the open window, in the tranquil summer night, absorbed in his book.

"He was that wrapped up that I don't believe he knew I was in the room, sir," said Lambert, "till I asked him if there was anything further wanted for the night, and then he starts, looks up at me with his pleasant smile, and answers in his quiet friendly way, 'Nothing more, thank you, Lambert. Is it very late?' I told him it was past eleven, and I asked if I should shut the drawing-room shutters before I went to bed, but he says 'No, I'll see to that—I like the windows open,' and then he went on reading, and less than two hours afterwards he was lying on the ground, in front of the window—dead."

"Have you any suspicion, Lambert, as to the murderer?"

"Well, no, sir; not unless it was a poacher or an escaped lunatic."

"The lunatic seems rather the more probable conjecture," said Matthew Dalbrook. "The police are at work already, I hope."

"Well, sir, yes; our local police are doing all that lies in their power, and I have done what I could to assist them. Mr. Dolby wired to Scotland Yard at the same time as he wired to you."

"That was wisely done. Have there been no traces of the murderer discovered? No indication of any kind?"

"Nothing, sir; but one of the under-housemaids remembers to have heard footsteps about on the terrace, after dark, on several occasions within the last fortnight; once while Sir Godfrey and our young lady were at dinner, and two or three times at a later hour when they were in the drawing-room or the library."

"Did she see any one?"

"No, sir; she is rather a dull kind of girl, and

never so much as troubled to find out what the footsteps meant. Her bedroom is one of the old attics on the south side of the house, and she was sitting at work near her open window when she heard the footsteps—going and coming—slow and stealthy like—upon the terrace at intervals. She is sure they were not her ladyship's nor Sir Godfrey's steps on either occasion. She says she knows their walk, and she would swear to these footsteps as altogether different. Slower, more creeping-like, as she puts it."

"Has no one been seen lurking about after dark?"

"No one, sir, as we have heard of; and the constable questioned all the servants, pretty close, I can tell you. He hasn't left much for the London detective to do."

Matthew Dalbrook had been the only questioner in this interrogatory. Theodore had sunk into a chair on entering the room, and sat silent, with a face of marble. He was thinking of the stricken girl whose life had been desolated by this mysterious crime. His father had not forgotten her; but he

had wanted, first of all, to learn all he could about her husband's death.

"How does Lady Carmichael bear it?" he asked presently.

"Very sadly, sir; very sadly. Mrs. Morley and Celestine are both with her. Mr. Dolby ordered that she should be kept as quite as possible, not allowed to leave her room if they could help it, but it has been very difficult to keep her quiet. Poor dear young lady! She wanted to go to *him*."

"Poor girl! poor girl! So happy yesterday!" said Matthew Dalbrook.

His son sat silent, as if he were made of stone.

Far, very far off, as it were at the end of a long dark vista, cut sharply across an impenetrable wood of choking thorns and blinding briars, he saw Juanita again radiant, again happy, again loving and beloved, and on the threshold of another life. The vision dazzled him, almost to blindness. But could it ever be? Could that loving heart ever forget this agony of to-day—ever beat again to a joyful measure? He wrenched himself from that selfish reverie; he felt a wretch for having yielded

up his imagination, even for a moment, to that alluring vision. He was here to mourn with her, here to pity her—to sympathize with this unspeakable grief. Murdered! Her lover-husband shot to death by an unknown hand, her honeymoon ended with one murderous flash—that honeymoon which had seemed the prelude to a lifetime of love.

"I should like to see her," said Mr. Dalbrook. "I think it would be a comfort to her to see me, however agitated she may be. Will you take my name to the housekeeper, and ask her opinion?"

Lambert looked doubtful as to the wisdom of the course, but was ready to obey all the same.

"Mr. Dolby said she was to be kept very quiet, sir—that she wasn't to see anybody."

"That would hardly apply to her own people. Mr. Dolby telegraphed for me."

"Did he, sir? Then I conclude he would not object to her ladyship seeing you. I'll send up your name. Perhaps, while the message is being taken, you would like to have a look at the spot where it happened?"

"Yes. I want to know all that can be known."

Lambert had been so busy with the constable all the morning that he felt himself almost on a level with Scotland Yard talent, and he took a morbid interest in that dark stain on the delicate half tints of the velvet pile, and in such few details as he was able to expound. He despatched a footman upstairs, and he led the Dalbrooks to the drawing-room, where he opened the shutters of that window through which the assassin must have aimed, and let a flood of sunshine into the darkened room.

The chair, the table, and lamp stood exactly as they had stood last night. Lambert took credit to himself for not having allowed them to be moved by so much as an inch.

"Any assistance in my power I shall be only to happy to give to the London detective," he said. "Of course, coming on the scene as a total stranger, he can't be expected to do much without help."

There was no need to point out that ghastly stain upon the carpet. The shaft of noonday sunshine seemed to concentrate its brightness on that grisly patch. Dark, dark, dark with the witness of a cruel murder—the murder of a man who had never

done an unkindly act, or harboured an unworthy thought.

Theodore Dalbrook stood looking at that stain. It seemed to bring the fatal reality nearer to him. He looked at the low chair with its covering of peacock plush, and its Turkish embroidery draped daintily across the broad back and capacious arms—a chair to live in—a sybarite's estate—and then at the satinwood book-table filled with such books as the lounger loves—Southey's "Doctor," "Burton," "Table Talk," by Coleridge, Whateley, Rogers, "The Sentimental Journey," "Rochefoucauld," "Caxtoniana," "Elia," and thrown carelessly upon one of the shelves a handkerchief of cobweb cambric, with a monogram that occupied a third of the fabric, "J.C." Her handkerchief, dropped there last night as she arranged the books for her husband's use—putting her own favourites in his way.

Lambert took up a book and opened it with a dismal smile, handing it to Mr. Dalbrook as he did so.

It was "Wider Horizons," the volume he had been reading when the bullet struck him, and those open pages were spattered with his blood.

"Put it away for God's sake, man," cried Dalbrook, horrified. "Whatever you do don't let Lady Carmichael see it."

"No, sir, better not, perhaps, sir — but it's evidence, and it ought to be produced at the inquest."

"Produce it if you like; but there is evidence enough to show that he was murdered on this spot."

"As he sat reading, sir; the book is a great point."

And then Lambert expounded the position of that lifeless form, making much of every detail, as he had done to the constable.

While he was talking, the door was opened suddenly, and Juanita rushed into the room.

"Lord have mercy on us, she musn't see that," cried Lambert, pointing to the carpet.

Matthew Dalbrook hurried forward to meet her, and caught her in his arms before she could reach that fatal spot. He held her there, looking at her with pitying eyes, while Theodore approached slowly, silently, agonized by the sight of her agony. The

change from the joyous self-abandonment of yesterday to the rigid horror of to-day was the most appalling transformation that he had ever looked upon. Her face was of a livid pallor, her large dark eyes were distended and fixed, and all their brilliancy was quenched like a light blown out. Her blanched lips trembled as she tried to speak, and it was after several futile efforts to express her meaning that she finally succeeded in shaping a sentence distinctly.

"Have they found his murderer?"

"Not yet, dearest. It is far too soon to hope for that. But it is not for you to think about that, Juanita. All will be done—be sure—rest secure in the devotion of those who love you; and——" with a break in his voice, "who loved him."

She lifted her head quickly, with an angry light in the eyes which had been so dull till that moment.

"Do you think I will leave that work to others?" she said. "It is my business. It is all that God has left me to do in this world. It is my business to see that his murderer suffers—not as I suffer—that can never be—but all that the law can do—

the law which is so merciful to murderers now-a-days. You don't think he can get off lightly, do you, uncle? They will hang him, won't they? Hang him—hang him—hang him," she repeated, in hoarse dull syllables. "A few moments' agony after a night of terror. So little—so little! And I have to live my desolate life. My punishment is for a lifetime."

"My love, God will be good to you. He can lighten all burdens," murmured Mr. Dalbrook, gently.

"He cannot lighten mine, not by the weight of a single hair. He has stretched forth His hand against me in hatred and anger, perhaps because I loved His creature better than I loved Him."

"My dearest, this is madness——"

"I did, I did," she reiterated. "I loved my husband better than I loved my God. I would have worshipped Satan if I could have saved him by Satan's help. I loved him with all my heart, and mind, and strength, as we are taught to love God. There was not room in my heart for any other religion. He was the beginning and the end

of my creed. And God saw my happy love and hated me for it. He is a jealous God. We are taught that when we are little children. He is a jealous God, and He put it into the head of some distracted creature to come to that window and shoot my husband."

A violent fit of hysteria followed these wild words. Matthew Dalbrook felt that all attempts at consolation must needs be vain for some time to come. Until this tempest of grief was calmed nothing could be done.

"She will have her mother here in a day or two," said Theodore. "That may bring some comfort."

Juanita heard him even in the midst of her hysterical sobbing. Her hearing was abnormally keen.

"No one, no one can comfort me, unless they can give me back my dead."

She started up suddenly from the sofa where Matthew had placed her, and grasped his arm with convulsive force.

"Take me to him," she entreated, "take me to

him, uncle. You were always kind to me. They won't let me go to him. It is brutal, it is infamous of them. I have a right to be there."

"By-and-by, my dear girl, when you are calmer."

"I will be calm this instant if you will take me to him," she said, commanding herself at once, with a tremendous effort, choking down those rising sobs, clasping her convulsed throat with constraining hands, tightening her tremulous lips.

"See," she said, "I am quite calm now. I will not give way again. Take me to him. Let me see him—that I may be sure my happy life was not all a dream—a mad-woman's dream—as it seems to have been now, when I cannot look upon his face."

Mr. Dalbrook looked at his son interrogatively.

"Let her see him," said Theodore, gently. "We cannot lessen her sorrow. It must have its way. Better perhaps that she should see him, and accustom herself to her grief; better for her brain, however it may torture her heart."

He saw the risk of a further calamity in his cousin's state—the fear that her mind would suc-

cumb under the burden of her sorrow. It seemed to him that there was more danger in thwarting her natural desire to look upon her beloved dead than in letting her have her way.

The housekeeper had followed her young mistress to the drawing-room door, and was waiting there. She shook her head, and murmured something about Mr. Dolby's orders, but submitted to the authority of a kinsman and family solicitor, as even superior to the faculty.

She led the way silently to that upper chamber where the murdered man was lying. Matthew Dalbrook put his cousin's icy hand through his arm and supported her steps as they slowly followed. Theodore remained in the drawing-room, walking up and down, in deepest thought, stopping now and then in his slow pacing to and fro to contemplate that stain upon the velvet pile, and the empty chair beside it.

In the room above Juanita knelt beside the bed where he who kissed her last night on the threshold of her chamber lay in his last slumber, a marble figure with calm dead face shrouded by the snowy

sheet, with flowers—white waxen exotics—scattered about the bed. She lifted the sheet, and looked upon him, and kissed him with love's last despairing kiss, and then she knelt beside the bed, with her face bent in her clasped hands, calmer than she had been at any moment since she found her murdered husband lying at her feet.

"It's wonderful," whispered the housekeeper to Mr. Dalbrook; "it seems to have soothed her, poor dear, to see him—and I was afraid she would have broke down worse than ever."

"You must give way to her a little, Mrs. Morley. She has a powerful mind, and she must not be treated like a child. She will live through her trouble, and rise superior to it, be sure of that; terrible as it is."

The door opened softly, and a woman came into the room, a woman of about five-and-forty, of middle height, slim and delicately made, with aquiline nose and fair complexion, and flaxen hair just touched with grey. She was deadly pale, but her eyes were tearless, and she came quietly to the bed, and fell on her knees by Juanita's side and hid her

face as Juanita's was hidden, and the first sound that came from her lips was a long low moan—a sound of greater agony than Matthew Dalbrook had ever heard in his life until that moment.

"Good God," he muttered to himself, as he moved to a distant window, "I had forgotten Lady Jane."

It was Lady Jane, the gentle soul who had loved that poor clay with a love that had grown and strengthened with every year of his life, with a love that had won liberal response from the recipient. There had never been a cloud between them, never one moment of disagreement or doubt. Each had been secure in the certainty of the other's affection. It had been a union such as is not often seen between mother and son; and it was ended—ended by the red hand of murder.

Matthew Dalbrook left the room in silence, beckoning to the housekeeper to follow him.

"Leave them together," he said. "They will be more comfort to each other than anyone else in the world can be to either of them. Keep in the way—here, in the corridor, in case of anything going

wrong—fainting, or hysterics, for instance—but so long as they are tolerably calm let them be together, and undisturbed."

He went back to his son, and they both left the house soon afterwards and drove off to find the Coroner and to confer with him. Later in the afternoon they saw the local policeman, whose discoveries, though he evidently thought them important, Mr. Dalbrook considered *nil*.

He had found out that a certain village freebooter—ostensibly an agricultural labourer, nocturnally a poacher—bore a grudge against Lord Cheriton, and had sworn to be even with him sooner or later. The constable opined that, being an ignorant man, this person might have mistaken Lord Cheriton's son-in-law for Lord Cheriton himself.

He had discovered, in the second place, that two vans of gipsies had encamped just outside the Chase on the night after the arrival of the bridal pair. They were, in fact, the very gipsies who had provided Aunt Sally and the French shooting gallery for the amusement of the populace, and he opined that some of these gipsies were "in it."

Why they should be in it he did not take upon himself to explain, but he declared that his experience of the tribe justified his suspicions. He was also of opinion that the murderer had come with the intent to plunder the drawing-room, which was in his own expression, "chock-full of valuables," and that, being disappointed, and furthermore detected, in that intent, he had tried to make all things safe by a casual murder.

"But, man alive, Sir Godfrey was sitting in his arm-chair, absorbed in his book. There was nothing to prevent any intending burglar sneaking away unseen. You must find some better scent than that if you mean to track the murderer."

"I hope, sir, with my experience of the district, I shall have a better chance of finding him than a stranger imported from the Metropolis," said Constable Barber, severely. "I conclude there will be a reward offered, Mr. Dalbrook?"

"There will, and a large one. I must not take upon myself to name the figure. Lord Cheriton will be here to-morrow or next day, and he will, no doubt, take immediate steps. You may consider

yourself a very lucky man, Barber, if you can solve this mystery."

Matthew Dalbrook turned from the eager face of the police-officer with a short, angry sigh. It was of the reward the man was thinking, no doubt—congratulating himself perhaps upon the good luck which had thrown such a murder in his way. And presently the man from Scotland Yard would be on the scene, keen and business-like, yet full of a sportsman's ardour, intent on discovery, as on a game in which the stakes were worth winning. Little cared either of these for the one fair life cut short, for the other young life blighted.

CHAPTER VII.

"I saw a Fury whetting a death-dart."

Lord Cheriton liked to take his summer holiday on a sunny sea-shore where there were not many English visitors. Paramé St. Malo fulfilled both these conditions. It afforded him a vast expanse of golden sands, firm beneath his foot, steeped in sunshine for the most part, on which to pace to and fro, lifting his eyes dreamily now and then to the sea-girt city, with its stony rampart, and its quaint Louis Quatorze mansions, facing the sea in the sober dignity of massive stone façade and tall windows; grey old houses, which seem too good for the age in which they find themselves, solid enough to last through long centuries, and to outlive all that yet lingers of that grandiose France in which they were built. Roof above roof rises the Breton city, steep old streets leading up to Cathedral and Municipal Palace, with

the crocketed steeple for its pinnacle, shining with a pale brilliance in the summer sunlight, verdureless, and with but little colour save the reflected glory of the skies, and the jasper green of the sea in its ring of golden sand.

Lord Cheriton affected Paramé because though it was within a summer night's journey from his own Isle of Purbeck, it was thoroughly out of the beaten track, and he was tolerably secure from those hourly encounters with his most particular friends, to which he must have submitted at Baden or Spa, at Trouville or Dieppe. Paramé was Parisian or nothing. The smart people all came from Paris. English smartness had its centre at Dinard, and the English who patronize Dinard will tell you there is no other paradise on earth, and that its winter climate is better than that of the Riviera, if people would only have faith. So long as the Cheritons could keep out of the way of exploring friends from Dinard, his Lordship was exempt from the amusements which to some minds make life intolerable.

Lady Cheriton was distinctly social in her instincts, and looked Dinard-wards sometimes from

her lotus-land with a longing eye. She would have liked to ask some nice people to luncheon; and she knew so many nice people at Dinard. She would have liked to organize excursions to Mont St. Michel, or up the Rance to Dinan. She would have liked to plunge into all manner of innocent gaieties; but her husband stamped out these genial yearnings.

"It seems such a pity not to have people over to dinner when there are such nice operettas and vaudevilles every night at the Casino," she sighed.

"And if you had them over to dinner, how do you suppose they would get back?" asked her husband, sternly. "Would you wish to keep them all till next morning, and be bored with them at breakfast?"

That intervening strip of sea, narrow as it was afforded unspeakable comfort to Lord Cheriton. It was an excuse for refusing to go over and take afternoon tea with people he was supposed to hold in his heart of hearts in the way of friendship.

"You can go, Maria, if you like," he told his wife; "but I am not a good sailor, and I came here on purpose to be quiet."

This was his Lordship's answer to every hospitable suggestion. He had come to Paramé for rest; and not for gadding about, or entertainments of any kind.

So the long summer days succeeded each other in a lazy monotony, and whatever gaiety there might be in the great white hotel, the English lawlord and his wife had no share in it. They occupied a suite of light, airy rooms in the west pavilion, and were served apart from the vulgar herd, after the fashion which befitted a person of Lord Cheriton's distinction. They had only their body servants, man and maid, so they were waited upon by the servants of the hotel, and they drove about the dusty, level roads between St. Servans and Del in a hired landau, driven by a Breton coachman. Lady Cheriton was dull, but contented. She had always submitted to her husband's pleasure. He had been a very indulgent husband in essentials, and he had made her a peeress. Her married life had been eminently satisfactory; and she could afford to endure one summer month of monotony amidst pleasant surroundings. She dropped in at

the Casino every evening, while Lord Cheriton read the papers in the seclusion of his salon—with the large French window wide open to the blue sea, and the blue moonlight—hearing the tramp of feet on the terrace, or the sea wall beyond, or now and again strains of lively music from the theatre, where the little opera company from Paris were singing Lecocq's joyous music.

People used to turn round to look at Lady Cheriton as she walked gravely between the rows of seats to her place near the orchestra, his Lordship's valet following with an extra shawl, an opera-glass, and a footstool. He established her in her chair, and then retired discreetly to the back of the theatre to await her departure, and to escort her safely back to the hotel. He was a large, serious looking man, a French Swiss, who had lived ten years in Italy, and over fifteen years in Lord Cheriton's service, and who spoke French, Italian, German, and English indifferently.

Lady Cheriton was handsome still, with a grand Spanish beauty which time had touched lightly. She was tall and dignified in carriage, though a

shade stouter than she could have wished, and she dressed to perfection with sobriety of colouring and richness of material. Her life had been full of pleasantness, her only sorrow being the loss of her infant sons, which she had not taken to heart so deeply as the proud father who had pined for an heir to his newly-won honours. She had her daughter, her first-born, the child for whom her heart had first throbbed with the strange new love of maternity. She shed some natural tears for the boy-babies, and then she let Juanita fill their place in her heart, and her life again seemed complete in its sum of happiness. And now in this sleepy summer holiday—cut off from most things that she cared for—Juanita's letters had been her chief joy—those happy, innocent, girlish letters, overflowing with fond, foolish praise of the husband she loved, letters made up of nothings—of what he had said to her, and what she had said to him—and where they had taken afternoon tea—and of their morning ride, or their evening walk, and of those plans for the long future which they were always making, projecting their thoughts into

the time to come, and laying out those after years as if they were a certainty.

There had been no fairer morning than that which followed the night of the murder. Lord Cheriton was an early riser at all seasons, most of all in the summer, when he was generally awake from five o'clock, and had to beguile an hour or so with one of the books on the table by his bed—a well-thumbed "Horace" or a duodecimo "Don Quixote," in ten volumes, which went everywhere with him. By seven o'clock he was dressed, and ready to begin the day; and between that hour and breakfast it was his habit to attend to the correspondence which had accumulated during the previous day. This severe rule was suspended, however, at Paramé, and he gave himself up to restful vacuity, strolling up and down the sands, or walking round the walls of St. Malo, or sauntering into the cathedral in a casual way for an early mass, enjoying the atmosphere of the place, with its old-world flavour.

On this particular morning he went no further than the sands, where he paced slowly to and fro

in front of the long white terrace, hotel, and casino, heedless alike of Parisian idlesse coquetting with the crisp wavelets on the edge of the sea, and of the mounted officer yonder drilling his men upon the sandy flat towards St. Malo. He was in a mood for idleness, but with him idleness was only a synonym for deep thought. He was meditating upon his only child's future, and telling himself that he had done well for her.

Sir Godfrey Carmichael would be made Baron Cheriton in the days to come, when he, the first Baron, should be laid in the newly built vault in the cemetery outside Dorchester. He was not going to sever himself from his kindred in that last sleep, albeit they were common folk. He would lie under the Egyptian sarcophagus which he had set up in honour of his father, the crockery dealer, and his mother, the busy, anxious house-wife. The sarcophagus was plain and unpretentious, hardly too good for the shopkeeper; yet with a certain solid dignity which was not unbefitting the law-lord, almost as massive as that mammoth cross which marks the resting-place of Henry Brougham in the fair southern

land. He had chosen the monument with uttermost care, so that it might serve the double purpose. He had looked at the broad blank panel many a time, wondering how his own name would look upon it, and whether his daughter would have a laurel wreath sculptured above it. It might be that admiring friends would suggest his being laid in the Abbey, hard by those shabby disused courts where he had pleaded and sat in judgment through so many laborious years; and it might be that the suggestion would be accepted by Dean and Chapter, and that the panel on the Dorchester sarcophagus would remain blank. James Dalbrook knew that he had deserved well of posterity, and, above all, of the ruling powers. He had been staunch and unwavering in his adherence to his own party, and he knew that he had a strong claim upon any Conservative Ministry. He had sounded those in authority, and he had been assured that there would be very little difficulty in getting Sir Godfrey Carmichael a peerage by-and-by, when he, Lord Cheriton, should be no more. Sir Godfrey's family was one of the oldest in the country, and he had but to deserve well of his

party, when he had got his seat, to ensure future favours. As the owner of the Cheriton and Milbrook estates, he would be a worthy candidate for one of those coronets which seem to be dealt round so freely by expiring Ministries, as it were a dying father dividing his treasures among his weeping children. So far as any man can think with satisfaction of the days when he shall be no more—and when this world will go on, badly, of course, but somehow, without him—Lord Cheriton thought of those far off years when Godfrey Carmichael should be owner of Cheriton Chase. The young man had shown such fine qualities of heart and mind, and, above all, had given such unobtrusive evidence of his affection for Juanita's father, that the elder man must needs give measure for measure; therefore Godfrey had been to Lord Cheriton almost as a son. The union of his humbly-born daughter with one of the oldest families in the south of England gratified the pride of the self-made man. His own pedigree might be of the lowliest; but his grandson would be able to look back upon a long line of ancestors, glorified by many a patrician alliance. Strong and

stern as was the fabric of James Dalbrook's mind, he was not superior to the Englishman's foible, and he loved rank and ancient lineage. He was a Tory to the core of his heart; and it was the earnestness and thoroughness of his convictions which had given him weight with his party. Wherever he spoke, or whatever he wrote—and he had written much upon current politics in the *Saturday Review*, and the higher class monthlies—bore the stamp of a Cromwellian vigour and a Cromwellian sincerity.

He had never felt more at ease than upon that balmy summer morning, pacing those golden sands in quiet meditation—brooding over Juanita's last letter received overnight—with its girlish raptures, its girlish dreams; picturing her in the near future as happy a mother as she was a bride, with his grandson, the third Baron Cheriton of the future, in her lap. He smiled at his own foolishness in thinking of that first boy-baby by the title which was but one of the possibilities of a foreshadowed sequence of events; yet he found himself repeating the words idly, to the rhythm of the wavelets that curled and sparkled near his feet—third Baron Cheriton,

Godfrey Dalbrook Carmichael, third Baron Cheriton.

The cathedral clock was striking nine as he went into the hotel. The light breakfast of coffee and rolls was laid on a small round table near the window. Lady Cheriton was sitting in a recess between the massive stone columns which supported the balcony above, reading yesterday's *Morning Post* in her soft grey cashmere peignoir, whose flowing lines gave dignity to her figure. Her dark hair, as yet untouched by time, was arranged with an elegant simplicity. The fine old lace about her throat harmonised admirably with the pale olive of her complexion. She looked up at her husband with her placid smile, and gave him her hand in affectionate greeting.

"What a morning, James! One feels it a privilege to live. What a superb day it would be for Mont St. Michel?"

"A thirty-mile drive in the dust! Do you really think that it is the best use to which to put a summer day? You may be sure there will be plenty of worthy people of the same opinion, and that the

rock will swarm with cheap tourists, and pretty little Madame Poulard will be put to the pin of her collar to feed them all."

She had seated herself at the table by this time, and was pouring out coffee with a leisurely air, smiling at her husband all the time, thinking him the greatest and wisest of men, even when he restrained her social instincts. She was never tired of looking at that massive face, with its clearly defined features, sharply cut jaw, and large grey eyes—dark and deep as the eyes of the earnest thinker rather than the shrewd observer. The strong projection of the lower brow indicated keen perceptions, and the power of rapid judgment; but above the perceptive organs the upper brow towered majestically, giving the promise of a mind predominant in the regions of thought and imagination—such a brow as we look upon with reverence in the portraits of Walter Scott.

Intellectually the brow was equal to Scott's; morally there was something wanting. Neither benevolence nor veneration was on a par with the reasoning faculties. Tory principles with Lord Cheriton were not so much the result of an upward-

looking nature as they were with Scott. This, at least, is the opinion at which a phrenologist might have arrived after a careful contemplation of that powerful brow.

Lord Cheriton sipped his coffee, and leaned back in his arm-chair, with his face to the morning sea. He sat in a lazy attitude, still thoughtful, with those pleasant thoughts which are the repose of the working man's brain.

The tide was going out; the rocky islets stood high out of the water; the sands were widening, till it seemed almost as if the sea were vanishing altogether from this beautiful bay.

"I suppose they will finish their honeymoon in a week or two, and move on to the Priory," said Lord Cheriton, by-and-by, revealing the subject of his reverie.

"Yes, Juanita says we may go home as early as the second week in August if we like. She is to be at the Priory in time to settle down before the shooting begins. They will have visitors in September—his sisters, don't you know—the Morningsides and the Grenvilles, and children and nurses—

a house full. Lady Jane ought to be there to help her to entertain."

"I don't think Nita will want any help. She will be mistress of the situation, depend upon it, and would be if there were forty married sisters with their husbands and belongings. She seemed to be mistress of us all at Cheriton?"

"She is so clever," sighed the mother, remembering that Cheriton House would no longer be under that girlish sovereignty.

The grave looking French-Swiss valet appeared with a telegram on a salver.

"Who can have sent me a *petit bleue?*" exclaimed Lord Cheriton, who was accustomed to receive a good many of those little blue envelopes when he was in Paris, but expected no such communications at St. Malo.

Before leaving for his holiday he had impressed upon land steward and house steward that he was not to be bothered about anything.

"If there is anything wanted you will communicate with Messrs. Dalbrook," he said. "They have full powers."

And yet here was some worrying message—some question about a lease or an agreement, or somebody's rick had been burnt, or somebody's chimney had fallen through the roof. He opened the little envelope with a vexed air, resentful of an expected annoyance. He read the message, and then sat blankly staring; read again, and rose from his seat suddenly with a cry of horror.

Never in his life had he experienced such a shock; never had those iron nerves, that heart, burned hard in the furnace of this world's strife, been so tried. He stood aghast, and could only give the little paper—with its type-printed syllables—to his scared wife, while he stood gazing at summer sky and summer sea in a blank helplessness, realizing dimly that something had happened which must change the whole course of the future, and overthrow every plan he had ever made.

"The third Baron Cheriton." Strange, but in that awful moment the words he had repeated idly on the sands half an hour ago echoed again in his ear.

Alas, he felt as if that title for which he had

toiled was already extinct. He saw, as in a vision, the velvet cap and golden coronet upon the coffin lid, as the first and last Lord Cheriton was carried to his grave. That prophetic vision must needs be realized within a few years. There would be no one to succeed him.

Murdered! Why? By whom? What devil had been conjured out of hell to cut short that honest, stainless life? What had Godfrey Carmichael done that a murderer's hand should be raised against him?

Lady Cheriton's softer nature found relief in tears before the day was done; tears and agonized pacings up and down those rooms where life had been so placid in the sunlight—agonized supplications that God would take pity upon her widowed girl.

"So young, and so happy, and a widow—a widow before her nineteenth birthday," wailed the mother.

Lord Cheriton's grief was of a sterner kind, and found no outlet in words. He held a brief consultation with his valet, a soldierly-looking man, who

had fought under Garibaldi in Burgundy, when the guerilla captain made his brilliant endeavour to save sinking France. They looked at time-tables and calculated hours. The express to Paris would not arrive in time for the evening mail *viâ* Calais and Dover. It was Saturday. The cargo boat would cross to Southampton that night, and influence would obtain accommodation for his Lordship and party on board her. The valet took a fly and drove off to the quay to find the South-Western superintendent, and secure a private cabin for his master and mistress. They would have the boat to themselves, and would be at Southampton at seven o'clock next morning, and at Cheriton before noon, even if it were necessary to engage a special engine to take them there.

Lord Cheriton telegraphed to his daughter.

"Your mother and I will be with you to-morrow morning. Be brave for our sakes. Remember that you are all we have to live for."

Another telegram to the house-steward ordered a close carriage to be in attendance at Wareham Station at ten o'clock on Sunday morning.

"How quietly you bear it, James," his wife told Lord Cheriton, wonderingly, when the mode of their return had been arranged, and her maid was packing her trunks, with those soberly handsome gowns which had been the wonder of many a butterfly Parisienne.

She called him by his Christian name now as in their earliest years of wedded life. It was only on ceremonious occasions, and when the eye of society was upon her that she addressed him by his title.

That stern quietude of his, the fine features set and rigid, frightened her more than a loquacious grief would have done. And yet she hardly knew whether he felt the calamity too much for words; or whether he did not feel it enough.

"Poor Godfrey," she sighed, "he was so good to me—all that a son could have been—murdered! My God! my God! how horrible. If it had been any other kind of death one might bear it—and yet that *he* should die at all would be too dreadful. So young, so handsome—cut off in the flower of his days! And she loved him so. She has loved him

all her life. What will become of her without him?"

"What will become of her?" that was the mother's moaning cry all through that dreary day.

Lord Cheriton paced the sands as far as he could go from that giddy multitude in front of the sea wall—beyond the little rocky ridge by the pleasant Hôtel des Bains, where the young mothers, and nurses, and children, and homely, easy-going visitors congregate—away towards Cancale, where all was loneliness. He walked up and down, meditating upon his blighted hopes. He knew now that he had loved this young man almost as well as he loved his own daughter, and that his death had shattered as fair a fabric as ever ambition built on the further side of the grave.

"She will go in mourning for him all the days of my life, perhaps," he thought, "and then some day after I am in my grave she will fall in love with an adventurer, and the estate I love and the fortune I have saved will be squandered on the Turf or thrown away at Monte Carlo."

A grim smile curled his lip at a grim thought, as

he paced that lonely shore beyond the jutting cliff and the villa on the point.

"I am sorry I left the Bench when I did," he thought, "it would have been something to have put on the black cap and passed sentence upon that poor lad's murderer."

Who was his murderer, and what the motive of the crime? Those were questions which Lord Cheriton had been asking himself with maddening iteration through that intolerable summer day. He welcomed the fading sunlight of late afternoon. He could eat nothing; would not even sit down to make a pretence of dining; but waited chafing in the great stone hall of the hotel for the carriage that was to take him and his wife to the steamer.

CHAPTER VIII.

"The stars move still, Time runs, the clock will strike."

Trains were favourable, and there was no necessity for a special engine to carry Lord Cheriton and his wife to the house of mourning. It was not yet noon when the closed landau drove in at the chief gate of the park, not that side gate in the deep, rocky lane, of which Mrs. Porter was custodian. One of the gardeners lived at the lodge, and it was he who opened the gate this Sunday morning. Lord Cheriton stopped the carriage to question him. He had heard a full account of the murder already from the station-master at Wareham.

"Have they found the murderer?" he asked.

"No, my Lord, I'm afraid they're not likely to—begging your Lordship's pardon for venturing an opinion."

The man was an old servant, and altogether a superior person.

"Were the gates locked at the usual time on Friday night?"

"Yes, my Lord—the gates were locked, but that wouldn't keep out a foot-passenger. There's the turnstile in the lane."

"Of course. Yes, yes. A London detective has been at work, I hear."

"Yes, my Lord; came yesterday before two o'clock, and has been about with Barber ever since."

"And have they discovered nothing?"

"Nothing, my Lord—or if they have it has been kept dark."

Lord Cheriton asked no further questions. The man was right. A detective from Scotland Yard was not likely to talk about any minor discoveries that he might have made. Only the one grand discovery of the guilty man would have been made known.

Five minutes later the carriage drew up in front of the hall door. What a blank and melancholy look the fine old house had with all the windows darkened. It did not look so dismal as a London

house with its level rows of windows and its flat façade would have looked under similar conditions; for here there was variety of mullion and moulding, bay-windows and oriel, dormer and lattice, and over all the growth of lovely creeping plants, starry clematis and passion-flower, clustering Banksia roses and waxen magnolia, an infinite beauty of form and colour. Yet the blind windows were there, with their dull, dead look and chilling suggestion of death. Lady Cheriton looked at the house for a moment or so as she got out of the carriage, and then burst into tears. It seemed to her as if she had scarcely realized the stern reality till that moment.

She went straight to her daughter's boudoir, a room with an oriel window looking across the wide expanse of the park, where the turf lay openest to the sunshine, and where the deer were wont to congregate. The garden was at its narrowest point just below this window, and consisted only of a broad gravel path, and a strip of flowers at the top of a steep grass bank that sloped down to the ha-ha which divided garden and park. The room was full

of Juanita's girlish treasures—evidences of fancies that had passed like summer clouds—accomplishments begun and abandoned—a zither in one corner—a guitar and a mandolin against the wall—an easel in front of one window—a gigantic rush work-basket lined with amber satin and crammed with all manner of silks, wools, scraps, and unfinished undertakings in another. The room remained just as she had left it when she went to London at the beginning of May. She had not occupied it during her honeymoon; and perhaps that was the reason she was here now in her desolation, sitting silent, statue-like, with Lady Jane by her side, on a sofa opposite the oriel. She lifted her eyelids when her mother came into the room, and looked up at her in speechless despair. She uttered no word of greeting, but sat dumbly. Lady Cheriton went over to her, and knelt by her side, and then, feebly, automatically, the widowed girl put her limp, cold hand into her mother's and hid her bloodless face upon her mother's breast.

Lady Cheriton held her there with one hand while she stretched out her other hand to Lady Jane.

"Dear Lady Jane, how good of you to be with her—to comfort her."

"Where else should I be?—I want to be near him!"

The gentle blue eyes filled with tears, the gracious head trembled a little. Then came a long shivering sigh and silence.

The mother knelt beside the sofa with her child's head leaning forward upon her matronly bosom. There may have been some comfort perhaps in that contact, some recurrence of the thoughts and feelings of earlier years, when the mother could console every grief and soothe every pain. No words came to either of those mourners. What could be said in mitigation of a sorrow that seemed to offer no point of relief, no counter-balancing good. There was nothing to be done but to sit still and suffer.

The silence lasted long, and then Juanita lifted her head suddenly from its heavy repose and looked fixedly in her mother's face.

"My father has come back with you?" she asked.

"Yes, dearest. We did not lose an hour. Had

there been any quicker way of travelling we would have been here sooner."

"My father will be able to find the murderer," said Juanita, scarcely hearing her mother's words, intent upon her own thought. "A great lawyer as he was; a judge, too; he must be able to trace the murderer—to bring him to justice—to take a life for a life. Oh, God!" with a shrill agonizing cry, "could a thousand lives give me back one hour of that one life? Yet it will be something—something—to know that his murderer has been killed—killed shamefully, in cold blood, in the broad light of day. Oh, God, thou Avenger of wrong, make his last hours bitter to him, make his last moments hopeless, let him see the gates of hell opening before him when he stands trembling with the rope round his neck."

There was an intensity of hatred in this vindictive appeal, which thrilled the two listeners with an icy horror. It was like a blast from a frozen region blowing suddenly in their faces, and they shivered as they heard. Could it be the girl they knew, the loving, lovable girl, who, in those deep, harsh tones,

called upon her God for vengeance and not for mercy?

"Oh, my love, my poor heart-broken love, pray to Him to have pity upon us, ask Him to teach us how to bow to the rod, how to bear His chastisement. That is the lesson we have to learn," pleaded Lady Jane, tearful and submissive, even in the depth of sorrow.

"Is it? *My* lesson is to see justice done upon the wretch who killed my husband—the malignant, the merciless devil. There was not one of those slayers of women and children in the Indian mutiny worse than the man who killed my love. What had *he* done—he, the kindest and best—generous, frank, pitiful to all who ever came in his way—what had *he* done to provoke any man's enmity? Oh, God, when I remember how good he was, and how much brighter and better the world was for having him——"

She began to pace the room, as she had paced it again and again in her slow hours of agony, her hands clasped above her dishevelled head, her great dark eyes—so dove-like in their hours of love and

happiness — burning with an angry light, lurid almost, in the excitement of her fevered brain. There had been times when Lady Jane had feared that reason must give way altogether amidst this wild delirium of grief. She had stayed to watch, and to console, forgetting her own broken heart, putting aside all considerations of her own sorrow as something that might have its way afterwards, in order to comfort this passionate mourner.

Comfort, even from affection such as this, was unavailing. Now and again the girl turned her burning eyes upon the mother's pale, resigned face, and for a moment a thought of that chastened, gentle grief softened her.

"Dear, dear Lady Jane, God made you better than any other woman on this earth, I believe," she cried amidst her anguish. "The saints and martyrs must have been like you, but I am not. I am not made like that. I *cannot* kiss the rod."

The meeting between Juanita and her father was more painful to him than to her. She hung upon his neck in feverish excitement, imploring him to avenge her husband.

"You can do it," she urged; "you who are so clever must know how to bring the murderer's guilt home to him. You will find him, will you not, father? He cannot have gone very far. He cannot have got out of the country yet. Think, it was only Friday. I was a happy woman upon Friday; only think of that—happy—sitting by Godfrey's side in the phaeton, driving through the sunset, and thinking how beautiful the world was and what a privilege it was to live. I had no more foreboding than the skylark had singing above our heads. And in less than an hour after midnight my darling was dead. Oh, God, how sudden. I cannot even remember his last words. He kissed me as he left me at my bedroom door—kissed me and said something. I cannot remember what it was; but I can hear the sound of his voice still—I shall hear it all my life."

Lord Cheriton let her ramble on. He had, alas, so little to say to her, such sorry comfort to offer. Only words, mere words—which must needs sound idle and hollow in the ear of grief, frame his consolatory speeches with what eloquence he might.

He could do nothing for her, since he could not give her back her dead. This wild cry for vengeance shocked him from those young lips; yet it was natural perhaps. He too would give much to see the assassin suffer; he too felt that the dock and the gallows would be too trivial a punishment for that accursed deed.

He had looked upon the marble face of him who was to have been the second Baron Cheriton—looked upon it in its placid repose, and had sworn within himself to do all that ingenuity could do to avenge that cruel murder.

"He could not have had an enemy," he told himself, "unless it was some wretch who hated him for being happy and beloved."

He had a long talk with Mr. Luke Churton, the London detective, who had exhausted all his means without arriving at any satisfactory result.

"I confess, my Lord, that I am altogether at a standstill," said Mr. Churton, when he had related all that he had done since his arrival on the scene early on Saturday afternoon. "The utmost information I have been able to obtain leaves me without

one definite idea. There is no one in the neighbourhood open to suspicion, so far as I can make out; for I am sure your lordship will agree with me that your butler's notion of a poacher resenting your treatment by the murder of your son-in-law is much too thin. One cannot accept such a notion as that for a moment," said Mr. Churton, shaking his head.

"No, that is an untenable idea, no doubt."

"The next suggestion is that some person was prowling about with the intention of abstracting trinkets and other valuables from the drawing-room —in an unguarded moment when the room might happen to be empty—and I admit that the present fashion of covering drawing-room tables and cabinets with valuables of every description is calculated to suggest plunder; but that kind of thing would be probable enough in London rather than in the country, and nothing is more unlikely than that a prowler of that order would resort to murder. Again, the manner in which the body was found, with the open book lying close to the hand that had held it, goes for to prove that Sir Godfrey was shot as he sat reading

—and at a time when a burglar could have no motive for shooting him."

"Do you think it was the act of a lunatic?"

"No, my Lord, for in that event the murderer would have been heard of or found before now. The gardens, park, and chase have been most thoroughly searched under my superintendence. It is not possible for a lap-dog to be hidden anywhere within this demesne. The neighbouring villages—solitary cottages—commons and copses—have been also submitted to a searching investigation—the police all over the country are on the alert. Of course the crime is still of very recent date. Time to us seems longer than it really is."

"No doubt, no doubt! I can find no other hypothesis than that the act was done by a madman—such a motiveless murder—a man sitting by a window reading—shot by an unknown hand from a garden terrace—remote from the outer world. Were we in Ireland the crime might seem commonplace enough. Sir Godfrey was a landowner—and that alone is an offence against the idle and the lawless in that unhappy country—but here,

in the midst of an orderly, God-fearing population——"

"Had Sir Godfrey no enemy, do you think, my Lord?" asked the detective, gravely. "The crime has the look of a vendetta."

"There never was a young man, owner of a considerable estate, more universally beloved. His tenants adore him—for as a landlord he has been exceptionally indulgent."

"He may have granted too much in some quarters, and too little in others."

"No, no. He has been judicious in his liberality, and he has a capital bailiff, an old man who was a servant on this estate many years ago."

"But there are other influences," said the detective, musingly. "Whenever I meet with a crime of this kind—motiveless apparently—I remember the Eastern Prince—I think he was one of those long-headed Orientals, wasn't he, my Lord, who used to ask 'Who is she?' In a thoroughly dark case I always suspect a woman behind the curtain. Sir Godfrey had been independent of all control for a good many years—and a young man of fortune,

handsome, open-hearted, with only a mother to look after him—well, my Lord, *you* know the kind of thing that generally happens in such cases."

"You mean that my son-in-law may have been involved in some disreputable intrigue?"

"I don't say disreputable, my Lord; but I venture to suggest that there may have been some—ahem—some awkward entanglement—with a married woman, for instance—and the husband—or another lover—may have belonged to the criminal classes. There are men who think very little of murder when they fancy themselves ill-used by a woman. Half the midnight brawls, and nearly half the murders, in the metropolis are caused by jealousy. I know what a large factor that is in the sum-total of crime, and unless you are sure there was no entanglement——"

"I am as sure as I can be of anything outside my own existence. I don't believe that Sir Godfrey ever cared for any woman in his life except my daughter."

"He might not have cared, my Lord, but he might have been drawn in," suggested Mr. Churton. "Young men are apt to be weak where

women are concerned; and women know that, unfortunately, and they don't scruple to use their power; not the best of 'em even."

Young men are apt to be weak. Yes, Lord Cheriton had seen enough of the world to know that this was true. It was just possible that in that young life, which had seemed white as snow to the eye of kindred and friends, there had been one dark secret, one corroding stain, temptation yielded to, promises given—never to be fulfilled. Such things have been in many lives, in most lives, perhaps, could we know all, Lord Cheriton thought, as he sat silently meditating upon the detective's suggestions.

Lady Jane might know something about her son's past, perhaps, something that she might have kept locked in the beneficent maternal heart. He determined to sound her delicately at the earliest opportunity.

But on being sounded Lady Jane repudiated any such possibility. No, again and again no. His youth had been spotless; no hint of an intrigue had ever reached her from any quarter. He had

chosen his friends among the most honourable young men at the University—his amusements had been such as became a young Englishman of exalted position—he had never stooped to low associations or even doubtful company; and from his boyhood upwards he had adored Juanita.

"That love alone would have kept him right," said Lady Jane; "but I do not believe that it was in his nature to go wrong."

It would seem, therefore, that the detective's suspicion was groundless. Jealousy could not have been the motive of the crime.

"If any of us could be sure that we know each other I ought to accept Lady Jane's estimate of her son," thought Lord Cheriton; "but there is always the possibility of an unrevealed nature—one phase in a character that has escaped discovery. I am almost inclined to think the detective may have hit upon the truth. There *must* have been a motive for this devilish act—unless it were done by a maniac."

The latter supposition seemed hardly probable. Lunacy wandering loose about the country would have betrayed itself before now.

It was past five upon that summer afternoon, and Lord Cheriton, having seen his daughter and interviewed the detective, was sauntering idly about the gardens in the blank hours before dinner. That meal would be served as usual, no doubt, at eight o'clock, with all due state and ceremony. The cook and her maids were busied about its preparation even now in this tranquil hour when afternoon melts into evening, sliding so softly from day to night that only those evening hymns of the birds—and on Sundays those melancholy church bells thrilling across the woods—mark the transition. They were scraping vegetables and whipping eggs while the birds were at vespers, and they were talking of the murder as they went about their work. When would they ever cease to gloat with ghoulish gusto on that deadly theme, with endless iteration of "says he" and "says she"?

Lord Cheriton left the stately garden with its quadruple lines of cypress and juniper, its marble balustrades, and clipped yew hedges five feet thick, its statues and alcoves. He passed through a little gate, and across a classic single-arched bridge to

the park, where he sauntered slowly beneath his immemorial elms, in a strange dream-like frame of mind, in which he allowed his senses to be beguiled by the balmy afternoon atmosphere and the golden light, until the all-pervading consciousness of a great grief, which had been with him all day, slipped off him for the moment, leaving only a feeling of luxurious repose, rest after labour.

Cheriton Chase was exercising its wonted influence upon him. He loved the place with that deep love which is often felt by the hereditary owner, the man born on the soil, but perhaps still oftener, and to a greater degree by him who has conquered and won the land by his own hard labour of head or hand, by that despicable personage, the self-made man. In all his wanderings—those luxurious reposeful journeyings of the man who has conquered fortune—James Dalbrook's heart yearned towards these ancient avenues and yonder grey walls. House and domain had all the charm of antiquity, and yet they were in a measure his own creation. Everywhere had his hand improved and beautified; and he might say with Augustus that where he

found brick he would leave marble. The dense green walls—those open-air courts and quadrangles —those obelisks of cypress and juniper had been there in the dominion of the Strangways, with here and there a mouldering stone Syrinx or a moss-grown Pan; but it was he who brought choicest marbles from Rome and Florence to adorn that stately pleasaunce; it was he who had erected yonder fountain, whose waters made a monotonous music by day and night. The marble balustrades, the mosaic floors, the artistic enrichment of terrace and mansion had been his work. If the farms were perfect it was he who had made them so. If his tenants were contented it was because he had shown himself a model landlord—considerate and liberal, but severely exacting, satisfied with nothing less than perfection.

Having thus in a manner created his estate James Dalbrook loved it, as a proud, self-contained man is apt to love the work of his own hands, and now in this quiet Sunday afternoon the very atmosphere of the place soothed him, as if by a spell. A kind of sensuous contentment stole into his

heart, with temporary forgetfulness of his daughter's ruined life. But this did not last long. As he drew near the drive by which strangers were allowed to cross the park by immemorial right, he remembered that he had questioned one of the lodge-keepers, but not the other. He struck across an open glade where only old hawthorn trees cast their rugged shadows on the close-cropped turf, and made for the gate opening into the lane.

Mrs. Porter's cottage had its usual aspect, a cottage such as any gentleman or lady of refined taste might have been pleased to inhabit, quaint, mediæval, with heavy timbers across rough cast walls, deep-set casements, picturesque dormers, and thatched roof, with gable ends which were a source of rapture to every artist who visited Cheriton—a cottage embowered in loveliest creeping plants, odorous of jasmine and woodbine, and set in a garden where the standard roses and carnations were rumoured to excel those in her ladyship's own particular flower-garden. Well might a lady who had known better days rejoice in such a haven; more

especially when those better days appeared to have raised her no higher than the status of a merchant-captain's wife.

Very few people about Cheriton envied her ladyship. It was considered that, if not born in the purple, she had at least brought her husband a large fortune, and had a right to taste the sweets of wealth. But there were many hard-driven wives and shabby genteel spinsters who envied Mrs. Porter her sinecure at the gate of Cheriton Park, and who looked grudgingly at the garden brimming over with flowers and the lattices shining in the evening sun, and through the open casements at prettily furnished rooms, rich in books and photographs, and other trivial indications of a refined taste.

"It is well to be she," said the curate's wife, as she went home from the village with two mutton chops in her little fancy basket, a basket which suggested ferns, and in which she always carried a trowel, to give the look of casual botany to her housewifely errands. "I wonder whether Lord Cheriton allows her an income for doing nothing,

or is it only house, and coals, and candles that she gets?" speculated the curate's wife, who lived in a brand new villa on the outskirts of Cheriton village, a villa that was shabby and dilapidated after three years' occupation, through whose thin walls all the winds of winter blew, and whose slate roof made the upper floor like a bakehouse under the summer sun.

Lord Cheriton, still sauntering in gloomy meditation, came to the cottage garden outside his gates, and found Mrs. Porter standing among her roses, a tall, black figure, the very pink and pattern of respectability, with her prayer-book in one hand and a grey silk sunshade in the other. She turned at the sound of those august footsteps, and came to the little garden gate to greet her benefactor, with a grave countenance, as befitted the circumstances.

"Good afternoon," he said briefly. "Have you just come from church?"

"Yes, I have been to the children's service."

"Not very interesting, I should imagine, for anybody past childhood?"

"It is something to do on a Sunday afternoon,

and I like to hear Mr. Kempster talk to the children."

"Do you? Well, there is no accounting for tastes. Can you tell me anything about my son-in-law's murderer? Have you seen any suspicious characters hanging about? Did you notice any one going into the park on Friday night?"

"No, I have not seen a mortal out of the common way. The gate was locked at the usual hour. Of course the gate would make no difference—it would be easy for any one to get into the park."

"And no one was seen about? It is extraordinary. Have you any idea, Mrs. Porter, any theory about this horrible calamity that has come upon us?"

"How should I have any theory? I am not skilled in finding out such mysteries, like the man who came from London yesterday. Has he made no discoveries?"

"Not one."

"Then you can't expect me to throw a light upon the subject."

"You have an advantage over the London detec-

tive. You know the neighbourhood—and you know what kind of man Sir Godfrey was."

"Yes, I know that. How handsome he was, how frank and pleasant looking, and how your daughter adored him. They were a beautiful couple."

Her wan cheeks flushed, and her eyes kindled as she spoke, as if with a genuine enthusiasm.

"They were, and they adored each other. It will break my daughter's heart. You have known trouble—about a daughter. I think you can understand what I feel for my girl."

"I do—I do! Yes, I know what you must feel—what she must feel in her desolation, with all she valued gone from her for ever. But she has not to drink the cup that *my* girl must drink, Lord Cheriton. *She* has not fallen. *She* is not a thing for men to trample under foot, and women to shrink away from."

"Forgive me," said Lord Cheriton, in a softened voice. "I ought not to have spoken of—Mercy."

"You ought never to speak of her—to me. I suppose you thought the wound was so old that it

might be touched with impunity, but you were wrong. That wound will never heal."

"I am sure you know that I have always been deeply sorry for you—for that great affliction," said Lord Cheriton gently.

"Sorry, yes, I suppose you were sorry. You would have been sorry if a footman had knocked down one of your Sèvres vases and smashed it. One is sorry for anything that can't be replaced."

"That is a harsh and unjust way of speaking, Mrs. Porter," said Lord Cheriton, drawing himself up suddenly with an air of wounded dignity. "You can tell me nothing about our trouble, I see; and I am not in the mood to talk of any older grief. Good night."

He lifted his hat with grave respect and walked back to the park gate, vanishing slowly from those grey eyes which followed him in eager watchfulness.

"Is he really sorry?" she asked herself. "Can such a man as that be sorry for anyone, even his own flesh and blood? He has prospered; all things have gone well with him. Can he be sorry?

It is a check, perhaps; a check to his ambitious hopes. It baulks him in his longing to found a family. He looks pale and worn, as if he had suffered: and at his age, after a prosperous life, it must be hard to suffer."

So mused the woman who had seen better days—embittered doubtless by her own decadence—embittered still more by her daughter's fall.

It was nearly ten years since the daughter had eloped with a middle-aged Colonel in a cavalry regiment, a visitor at the Chase—a man of fortune and high family, with about as diabolical a reputation as a man could enjoy and yet hold Her Majesty's commission.

Mercy Porter's fall had been a surprise to everybody. She was a girl of shy and reserved manners, graver and sadder than youth should be. She had been kept very close by her mother, allowed to make no friendships among the girls in the village, to have no companions of her own age. She had early shown a considerable talent for music, and her piano had been her chief pleasure and occupation. Lady Cheriton had taken a good deal of notice of her

when she grew up, and she might have done well, the gossips said, when they recalled the story of her disgrace; but she chose to fall in love with a married man of infamous character, a notorious profligate, and he had but to beckon with his finger for her to go off with him. The circumstances of her going off were discussed confidentially at feminine tea-drinkings, and it was wondered that Mrs. Porter could hold her head so high, and show herself at church three times on a Sunday, and entertain the curate and his wife to afternoon tea, considering what had happened.

The curate and his wife were new arrivals comparatively, and only knew that dismal common story from hearsay. They were both impressed by Mrs. Porter's regular attendance at the church services, and by the excellence of that cup of tea with which she was always ready to entertain them whenever they cared to drop in at her cottage between four and five o'clock.

The inquest was opened early on the afternoon of Monday at the humble little inn near the forge.

with its rustic sign, "Live and let live." Juanita gave her evidence with a stony calmness which impressed those who heard her more than the stormiest outburst of grief would have done. Her mother and her husband's mother had both implored her not to break down, to bear herself heroically through this terrible ordeal, and they were both in the room to support her by their presence. Both were surprised at the firmness of her manner, the clear tones of her voice as she made her statement, telling how she had heard the shot in her dream, and how she had gone down to the drawing-room to find Sir Godfrey lying face downward on the carpet, in front of the chair where he had been sitting, his hand still upon the open book, which had fallen as he fell.

"Did you think of going outside to see if anyone was lurking about?"

"No, I thought of nothing but trying to save him. I did not believe that he was dead."

There was a look of agony in her large wide open eyes as she said this—a piteous remembrance of

the moment while she still hoped—which thrilled the spectators.

"What course did you take?"

"I rang for the servants. They came after a time that seemed long—but I believe they came quickly."

"And after they had come——?"

"I remembered nothing more. They wanted me to believe that he was dead—and I would not —I could not believe—and—I remember no more till next day."

"That will do, Lady Carmichael. I will not trouble you further."

Lady Jane and Lady Cheriton wanted to take her away after this, but she insisted upon remaining.

"I wish to hear every word," she said.

They submitted, and the three women, robed in densest black, sat in a little group behind the Coroner till the end of that day's inquiry.

No new facts were elicited from any of the witnesses, and nothing had resulted from the elaborate search made not only throughout Lord Cheri-

ton's domain, but in the neighbourhood. No suspicious prowlers had been heard of. The gipsies who had contributed to the gaiety of the wedding day had been ascertained to have left the Isle of Purbeck a fortnight before the murder, and to be delighting the larger world between Portsmouth and Havant. Nothing had been discovered; no sale of revolver or gun to any questionable purchaser at Dorchester; no indication however slight which might put a keen-witted detective upon the trail. Mr. Churton confessed himself completely at fault.

The jury drove to Cheriton House to view the body, and the inquest was adjourned for a fortnight, in the expectation that some discovery might be made in the interim. The funeral would take place at the usual time; there was nothing now to hinder the victim being laid in his last resting-place in the old Saxon church at Milbrook.

Bills offering a reward of £500 for any information leading to the discovery of the murderer were all over the village, and in every village and town within a radius of forty miles. The stimulus of

cupidity was not wanting to sharpen the rural wit. Mr. Churton shook his head despondently when he talked over the inquest with Lord Cheriton later in the day, and owned himself "out of it."

"I have been in many dark cases, my Lord," he said, "and I've had many hard nuts to crack, but this beats 'em all. I can't see my way to making anything of it; and unless you can furnish me with any particulars of the poor young gentleman's past life, of an enlightening character, I don't see much hope of getting ahead."

"You stick to your idea of the murder being an act of revenge?"

"What other reason could there be for such a murder?"

That question seemed unanswerable, and Lord Cheriton let it pass. Matthew Dalbrook and his elder son were to dine with him that evening, in order to talk quietly and calmly over the terrible event of last week, and the bearing which it must have upon his daughter's future life. Lady Cheriton and Lady Jane Carmichael had lived entirely on the upper floor, taking such poor apologies for meals as

they could be induced to take in her ladyship's morning-room. That closed door at the eastern end of the corridor exercised its solemn influence upon the whole house. Those mourning women never went in or out without looking that way—and again and again through the long still days they visited that chamber of death, carrying fairest blooms of stephanotis or camellia, whitest rose-buds, waxen lilies; kneeling in silent prayer beside that white bed.

During all those dismal days before the funeral Juanita lived secluded in her own room, only leaving it to go to that silent room where the white bed and the white flowers made an atmosphere of cold purity, which chilled her heart as if she too were dead. She counted the hours which remained before even this melancholy link between life and death would be broken, and when she must stretch out her hands blindly to find one whom the earth would hide from her for evermore. In the brief snatches of troubled sleep that had visited her since Friday night she had awakened with her husband's name upon her lips, with outstretched hands that yearned for the

touch of his, awakening slowly to consciousness of the horrible reality. In every dream that she had dreamed he had been with her, and in some of those dreams had appeared with a distinctness which involved the memory of her sorrow. Yes, she had thought him dead—yes, she had seen him stretched bleeding at her feet; but that had been dream and delusion. Reality was here, here in his strong voice, here in the warm grasp of his hand, here in the lying vision that was kinder than truth.

Mr. Dalbrook and his son arrived at a quarter to eight, and were received by Lord Cheriton in the library. The drawing-room was now a locked chamber, and it would be long doubtless before any one would have the courage to occupy that room. The Dalbrooks were to stay at Cheriton till after the funeral. Matthew Dalbrook had been Sir Godfrey's solicitor, and it would be his duty to read the will.

He was also one of the trustees to Juanita's marriage settlement, and the time had come—all too soon—when the terms of that settlement would have to be discussed.

"How is my cousin?" asked Theodore, when he had shaken hands with Lord Cheriton.

"Have you seen her since—Friday?"

"Yes, I saw her on Saturday morning. She was terribly changed."

"A ghastly change, is it not?" said Lord Cheriton, with a sigh. "I doubt if there is any improvement since then; but she behaved splendidly at the inquest this afternoon. We were all prepared for her breaking down. God knows whether she will ever get the better of her grief, or whether she will go down to the grave a broken-hearted woman. Oh! Matt," turning to his kinsman and contemporary, "such a trial as this teaches us how Providence can laugh at our best laid plans. I thought I had made my daughter's happiness as secure as the foundations of this old house."

"You did your best, James. No man can do more."

Theodore was silent for the most part after his inquiry about his cousin. He listened while the elder men talked, and gave his opinion when it was asked for, and showed himself a clear-headed man

of business; but his depression was not the less evident. The thought of Juanita's grief—the contrast between her agony now and her joyousness the day she was at Dorchester—was never absent from his mind; and the talk of the two elder men, the discussion as to the extent of her possessions, her power to do this and that, the house she was to live in, the establishment she was to keep, jarred upon him horribly.

"By the conditions of the settlement, the Priory is to be hers for her life, with everything it contains. By the conditions of Sir Godfrey's will, in the event of his leaving no issue, the Priory estate is to go after his widow's death to Mrs. Grenville's eldest son, or failing a son in that direction, then to Mrs. Morningside's eldest son. Should neither sister leave a son surviving at the time of Lady Carmichael's death the estate is to be sold, and the product divided in equal portions among the surviving nieces; but at the present rate at which the two ladies are filling their nurseries there is very little doubt there will be a surviving son. Mrs. Grenville was Sir Godfrey's favourite, I know, and

I can understand his giving her boy the estate, and thus founding a family, rather than dividing the property between the issue of the two sisters."

"I do not think anybody can find fault with his will," said Lord Cheriton. "God knows that when I saw him sign it in my room in Victoria Street, an hour after his marriage, nothing was further from my thoughts than the idea that the will would come into force within the next fifty years. It seemed almost an idle precaution for so young a man to be in such a hurry to set his house in order."

"Do you think Juanita will decide to live at the Priory?" asked Mr. Dalbrook.

"It would seem more natural for her to live here with her mother and me, but I fear that this house will seem for ever accursed to her. She will remember that it was her own whim to spend her honeymoon here. It will seem to her as if she had brought her husband to his death. Oh, God, when I remember how her mother and I suggested other places—how we talked to her of the Tyrol and the Dolomites, of Hungary, Norway—and with what a kind of childish infatuation she clung to her fancy for

this house, it seems as if a hideous fatality guided her to her doom. It is her doom, as well as his. I do not believe she will ever be a happy woman again."

"It may seem so now to us all, to herself most of all, poor girl," answered Matthew Dalbrook. "But I never saw a sorrow yet that Time could not heal, and the sorrow of a girl of nineteen leaves such a wide margin for Time's healing powers. God grant that you and I may both live to see her bright and happy again—with a second husband. There is something prosaic, I feel, in the very sound; but there may be some touch of romance even in a second love."

He did not see the painful change in his son's face while he was talking: the sudden crimson which faded slowly to a ghastly pallor. It had never occurred to Matthew Dalbrook that his son Theodore had felt anything more than a cousinly regard for Lord Cheriton's daughter.

The funeral took place on the following Wednesday—one of those funerals about which people talk

for a month, and in which grief is almost lost sight of by the majority of the mourners in a feverish excitement. The procession of carriages, very few of them unoccupied, was nearly half a mile long—the little churchyard at Milbrook could scarcely contain the mourners. The sisters' husbands were there, with hats hidden in crape, and solemn countenances; honestly sorry for their brother-in-law's death, but not uninterested in his will. All the district, within a radius of thirty miles, had been on the alert to pay this last mark of respect to a young man who had been universally liked, and whose melancholy fate had moved every heart.

The will was read in the library, and Juanita appeared for the first time since her cousins had been at Cheriton. She came into the room with her mother, and went to Matthew and his son quietly, and gave a hand to each, and answered their grave inquiries about her health without one tear or one faltering accent; and then she took her seat beside her father's chair, and waited for the reading of the will. It seemed to her as if it contained her hus-

band's last words, addressed to her from his grave. He knew when he wrote or dictated those words that she would not hear them in his lifetime. The will left her a life-interest in everything, except twenty thousand pounds in consols to Lady Jane, a few legacies to old servants and local charities, and a few souvenirs to college friends. Sir Godfrey had held the estate in fee simple, and could deal with it as he pleased. He expressed a hope that if his wife survived him she should continue to live at the Priory, and that the household should remain, as far as possible, unchanged, that no old horse should ever be sold, and no dogs disposed of in any way off the premises. This last request was to secure a continuance of old customs. His father had never allowed a horse that he had kept over a twelvemonth to be sold; and had never parted with a dog. His own hand shot the horse that was no longer fit for service; his own hand poisoned the dog whose life had ceased to be a blessing.

When the will was finished, and it was by no means a lengthy document, Lady Jane kissed her daughter-in-law.

"You will do as he wished, won't you, dearest?" she said, softly.

"Live at the Priory—yes, Lady Jane, unless you will live there instead. It would be more natural for you to be mistress there. When—when—my darling made that will he must have thought of me as an old woman, likely to survive him by a few years at most, and it would seem natural to him for me to go on living in his house—to continue to live—those were his words, you know—to continue to live in the home of my married life. But all is different now, and it would be better for you to have the Priory. It has been your home so long. It is full of associations and interests for you. I can live anywhere—anywhere except in this detested house."

She had spoken in a low voice all the time, so low as to be quite inaudible to her father and Matthew Dalbrook, who were talking confidentially upon the other side of the wide oak table.

"My love, it is your house. It will be full of associations for you too—the memories of his youth. It may comfort you by-and-by to live among the

things he cared for. And I can be with you there now and then. You will bear with a melancholy old woman now and then," pleaded Lady Jane, with tearful tenderness.

The only answer was a sob, and a clinging pressure of the hand; and then the three women quietly left the room. Their interest in the business was over. Blinds had been drawn up and Venetian shutters opened. There was a flood of sunshine on the staircase and in the corridors as Juanita went back to her room. The perfume of roses and the breath of summer came in at the open windows.

"Oh, God, how the sun shines," she cried, in a sudden agony of remembrance.

Those odours from the garden, the blue sky, summer greenery and dazzling summer light brought back the image of her vanished happiness. Last week, less than a week ago, she had been one of the joyous creatures in that glad, gay world—joyous as the thrush whose song was thrilling upon the soft sweet air.

Lady Jane's two sons-in-law had drawn near the

oak table at which the lawyer was seated with his papers before him.

Jessica's husband, Mr. Grenville, was sporting. His thoughts were centred in his stable, where he found an all-sufficient occupation for his intellectual powers in an endless buying, exchanging, selling, summering and wintering his stud; in the invention of improved bits, and the development of new ideas in saddlery; in the performance of operations that belong rather to the professional veterinary than to the gentleman at large, and in the conversation of his stud groom. These resources filled up all the margin that was left for a man who hunted four days a week in his own district, and who often got a fifth and even a sixth day in other countries accessible by rail. It may have been a natural result of Mr. Grenville's devotion to the stable that Mrs. Grenville was absorbed by her nursery; or it may have been a natural bent on the lady's part. However this might be, the lady and the gentleman followed parallel lines, in which their interests never clashed. He talked of hardly anything but his horses; she rarely mentioned any other subject than

her children, or something bearing upon her children's well-being. He believed his horses to be the best in the county; she considered her babies unsurpassed in creation. Both in their line were supremely happy.

Mr. Morningside, married to Sir Godfrey's younger sister, Ruth, was distinctly Parliamentary; and had no sympathies in common with such men as Hugo Grenville. To him horses were animals with four legs who dragged burdens; who were expensive to keep, and whose legs were liable to "fill" or to develop superfluous bone on the slightest provocation. His only idea of a saddle horse was a slow and stolid cob, for whose virtuous disposition and powerful bone he had paid nearly three hundred pounds, and on which he pounded round the park three or four times every morning during the Parliamentary season, an exercise of which he was about as fond as he was of Pullna water, but which had been recommended him for the good of his liver.

Mr. Morningside had a castle in the north, too near Newcastle to be altogether beautiful, and he

had a small suite upon a fifth floor in Queen Anne's Mansion. He had taken this apartment as a bachelor *pied à terre* for the Parliamentary season; and he had laid considerable emphasis upon the landowner's necessity for stern economy which had constrained him to take rooms so small as to be altogether "impossible" for his wife. Mrs. Morningside was, however, of a different opinion. No place was impossible for her which her dear Stuart deigned to occupy. She did not mind small rooms, or a fifth story. Was there not a lift, and were there not charming people living ever so much nearer the skies? She did not mind even what she gracefully described as "pigging it," for her dear Stuart's sake. She was utterly unlike her elder sister, and she had no compunction at placing over two hundred miles between her and her nursery.

"They'd wire for me if anything went wrong," she said, "and the express would take me home in a few hours."

"That would depend upon what time you got the wire. The express doesn't go every quarter of an

hour like a Royal Blue," replied Mr. Morningside, gloomily.

He was a dry-as-dust man; one of those self-satisfied persons who are never less alone than when alone. He had married at five-and-thirty, and the comfortable habits of a priggish bachelor still clove to him after six years of married bliss. He was fond of his wife in her place, and he thought her a very charming woman at the head of his table, and receiving his guests at Morningside Castle. But it was essential to his peace that he should have many solitary hours in which to pore over Blue books and meditate upon an intended speech. He fancied himself greatly as a speaker, and he was one of those Parliamentary bores whose ornate periods are made mincemeat of by the reporters. He looked to a day when he would take his place with Burke and Walpole, and other giants, whose oratory had been received coldly in the dawn of their senatorial career. He gave himself up to much study of politics past and present, and was one of those well-informed bores who are only useful as a store-house of hard facts for the use of livelier speakers.

When a man had to speak upon a subject of which he knew nothing, he went to Mr. Morningside as to a Parliamentary Encyclopædia.

To sustain these stores of knowledge Mr. Morningside required much leisure for what is called heavy reading; and heavy reading is not easy in that genial family life which means incessant talk and incessant interruption. Mr. Morningside would have preferred, therefore, to keep his den on the fifth floor to himself; but his wife loved London, and he could not refuse her the privilege of occasionally sharing his nest on a level with the spires and towers of the great city. She made her presence agreeably felt by tables covered with photograph easels, Vallauris vases, stray flowers in specimen glasses, which were continually being knocked over, Japanese screens, and every known variety of chair-back; and albeit he was an essentially dutiful husband, Mr. Morningside never felt happier than when he had seen his Ruth comfortably seated in the Bournemouth express on her way to the home of her forefathers for one of those protracted visits that no one but a near relation would venture to

make. He left her cheerily on such occasions, with a promise to run down to the Priory on Saturday evenings whenever it was possible to leave the helm.

Mr. Morningside had liked his brother-in-law as well as it was in him to like any man, and had been horrified at that sudden inexplicable doom; but Sir Godfrey being snatched off this earth in the flower of his age, Mr. Morningside thought it only natural that the young Morningsides should derive some benefit, immediate or contingent, from their uncle's estate. It was, therefore, with some disgust that he heard that clause in the will which gave Jessica's sons the preference over all the sons of Ruth. True that failing any son of Jessica's, the estate was to lapse to the eldest surviving son of Ruth; but what earthly value was such a reversionary interest as this in the case of a lady whose nursery was like a rabbit warren?

"I congratulate you on your eldest boy's prospects, Grenville," said Mr. Morningside, sourly. "Your Tom," a boy whom he hated, "will come into a very fine thing one of these days."

"Humph," muttered Grenville, "Lady Car-

michael's is a good life, and I should be very sorry to see it shortened. Besides, who can tell? Before this time next year there may be a nearer claimant."

"Lord have mercy upon us," exclaimed Morningside, "I never thought of *that* contingency."

CHAPTER IX.

"Poor girl! put on thy stifling widow's weed,
And 'scape at once from Hope's accursed bands;
To-day thou wilt not see him, nor to-morrow,
And the next day will be a day of sorrow."

Life falls back into old grooves after calamities the most stupendous. After fires—after plagues—after earthquakes—people breakfast and dine, marry and are given in marriage. A few more graves testify to the fever that has decimated a city; a ruined village here and there along the smiling southern shore, shells that were once houses, churches beneath whose shivered domes no worshipper dare ever kneel again, bear witness to the earthquake; but the monotonous common-place of life goes on all the same in city and village, on hill and sea-shore. And so when Godfrey Carmichael was laid in his grave, when the police had exhausted their ingenuity in the vain endeavour to fathom the secret of his death—when the coroner

had adjourned and again adjourned his inquiry, and an open verdict had been pronounced, life in Cheriton House resumed its old order, and the room in which the bridegroom had lain murdered at the feet of the bride was again thrown open to the sun and air, and to the sound of voices, and to the going and coming of daily life.

Lady Cheriton would have had the room closed; for a year at least, she pleaded; but her husband told her that to make it a sealed chamber now would be to throw it out of use for his lifetime.

"If we once let servants and people think and talk of it as a haunted room nobody will ever like to occupy it again so long as this house stands," he said. "Stories will be invented—those things shape themselves unawares in the human mind—sounds will be heard, and the whole house will become uninhabitable. We both love our house, Maria. Our own hands have fashioned it after our own hearts. It would be folly to put a brand upon it, and to say henceforward it shall be accursed to us. God knows I am sorry for Juanita's sorrow, sorry for my own loss; but I look to you to help me in keeping

our home bright and pleasant for our declining days."

It was the habit of her life to obey him and try to please him in all things; so she answered gently,—

"Of course, dear James, it shall be as you wish. I feel sure you are right. It would be wicked to shut up that lovely room"—with a faint shudder; "but I shall never go near the west window without thinking of—our dear boy. And I'm afraid Juanita will never be able to endure the room."

"Perhaps not. We can use the other rooms when she is here. She has her own house now; and I daresay it will be some time before she will care to cross this threshold. The house must seem fatal to her. It was her own caprice that brought him here. I'm afraid that recollection will torture her, poor child."

It was finally decided therefore that the drawing-room should be used nightly, as it had been in all the peaceful years that were gone. The lamps with their gay shades of rose or amber made spots of coloured light amidst tables heaped with flowers.

All the choicest blooms that the hothouses or the gardens could produce were brought as of old, like offerings to a pagan shrine. The numberless toys upon the tables were set out in the old orderly disorder—porcelain and enamel bon-bon boxes on one table—antique watches and gold and silver snuff-boxes on another—bronzes, intaglios, coins, medals, filigree scent bottles upon a third, and a background of flowers everywhere. The piano was opened, and the candles lighted ready for her ladyship, who sang Spanish ballads delightfully even yet, and who was in the habit of singing to her husband of an evening whenever they were alone.

They were generally alone now, not being able to receive visitors from the outside world at such a time. The Vicar of the parish dined at Cheriton now and then, and Matthew Dalbrook spent a night there occasionally, and talked over business matters, and the future development of a tract of land at Swanage, which formed a portion of the original Strangway estate.

The widow had taken possession of her new home, the home which they two were to have lived in for

half a century of loving union. They had joked about their golden wedding as they sat at lunch on the lawn that day; had laughed at the thought of how they would look in white hair and wrinkles, and then had sighed at the thought of how those they loved now would be gone before that day came, and how the friends who gathered round them would be new friends, the casual acquaintances of the passing years promoted to friendship in the place of those earlier, nearer, dearer friends whom death had taken.

They had talked of their silver wedding, which seemed a happier idea; for dear Lady Jane and Juanita's mother and father might all live to see that day. They would be old, of course, older by five-and-twenty years; but not too old to be happy and beloved. The young wife and husband pictured the lawn on which they were sitting crowded with friends and tenants and villagers and children; and planned the feasting and the sports, which were to have a touch of originality, something out of the beaten track, which something was not easy to devise.

And now she and Lady Jane were sitting in the same spot, in the sultry August evening, two desolate women; the tawny giant at their feet, *his* dog, the mastiff Styx, looking up at them now and then with great serious eyes, as if asking what had become of his master.

Juanita was strangely altered since the days of her honeymoon. Her cheeks had hollowed, and the large dark eyes looked larger, and gave a haggard expression to the pallid face; but she was bearing her sorrow bravely for Lady Jane's sake, as Lady Jane had done for her sake, in the beginning of things. That gentle lady had broken down after the funeral, and Juanita had been constrained to forget her own agony for a brief space in trying to comfort the bereaved mother; and so the two acted and re-acted upon each other, and it was well for them to be together.

They had settled down in the old house before they had been there a week. Lady Jane put off her return to Swanage indefinitely. She could drive over now and then to supervise the gardening, and she would stay at the Priory as long as Juanita wanted her.

"That would be always," said Juanita.

"Ah, my love, that would not do. I don't forget all that has been written about mothers-in-law. There must be some truth in it."

"Oh, but you forget. That is when there is a son and husband to quarrel about," said Juanita, with a sudden sob. "We have no cause for jealousy. We have only our dead."

Lady Jane wanted to establish her daughter-in-law in that cheerful sitting-room which had been her own, but here Juanita opposed her.

"I am not going to have it—now," she said, resolutely. "It shall be your room always. No one else shall use it. I am going to have his room for my den."

"My dearest, it is the dullest room in the house."

"It was his room, and I like it better than any other in the world."

She arranged all her own books and possessions in the large room looking into the stable yard, which had been Sir Godfrey's study from the time he went to Eton. She found all his Eton books on a lower shelf of one of the book-cases, and she sat on the

floor for an hour dusting grammars and dictionary, first Greek Reader, Latin Gradus, and all the rest of them. She found his college books, with the college arms upon them, on another shelf. She would have nothing disturbed or altered, and she was supremely indifferent to the question of incongruity. Her own book-cases from Cheriton, the dainty toy book-cases of inlaid satin wood, were squeezed into the recesses on each side of the fireplace. Her photographs of mother, father, friends, horses, and dogs, were arranged upon the carved oak mantelpiece, above the quaint little cupboards with carved doors, spoil of old Belgian churches, still full of choice cigars, the young man's store. His spurs and hunting-crops, canes, and boxing-gloves, decorated the panel between the two tall windows. His despatch box still stood upon the library table, and the dog Styx pushed the door open whenever it was left ajar and strolled into the room as by old established right.

She felt herself nearer her dead husband here than anywhere else; nearer even than in the church-yard, where she and Lady Jane went every afternoon with fresh flowers for his grave. They had not laid

him in the family vault, but among the graves of gentle and simple, under the sunny turf. The marble was not yet carven which was to mark out his grave amidst those humbler resting-places.

Theodore Dalbrook had not seen his cousin since the day of the funeral. His father and his two sisters had called upon her at the Priory, and had brought back an account of the quiet dignity with which she bore herself in her melancholy position.

"I did not think she had so much solid sense," said Janet, and then she and Sophia talked about the Priory as a dwelling-house, and of its inferiority to Cheriton, and speculated upon the amount of their cousin's income.

"She has a splendid position. She will be a fine catch for some one by-and-by," said Harrington. "I hope she won't go and throw herself away upon an adventurer."

"I hope not," said his father, "but I suppose she will marry again? That seems inevitable."

"I don't see that it is inevitable," argued Theodore, almost angrily. "She was devotedly attached

to her husband. I suppose there is now and then a woman who can remain faithful to a first love——"

"When the first love is alive, and not always then," put in Sophia, flippantly. "Of course she will marry again. If she wanted to remain single people would not let her, with her income."

Theodore got up and walked to the window. His sister's talk often set his teeth on edge, but rarely so much as it did to-day.

"You talk of her as if she were the most shallow-brained of women," he exclaimed, with his back to the family group, looking out with gloomy eyes into the old-fashioned street, the narrow circumscribed view which he had hated of late with a deadly hatred.

"I don't think she is very deep," answered Sophia. "She never could appreciate Darwin. She told me once that she wondered what I could find to interest me in earth-worms."

"A woman must, indeed, be shallow who feels no interest in that thrilling subject," sneered Theodore.

"Upon my word, now," said his father, "Dar-

win's book interested me, though I'm not a scientific man. And I never see a worm wriggling off the gardener's spade without feeling that I ought to be grateful to him as a factor in the landed interest. Perhaps," continued Mr. Dalbrook, musingly, "my own practice in the conveyancing line owes something of its substantial character to earth-worms. If it were not for *them* there might be no land to convey."

The conversation drifted lightly away from Juanita and her sorrow, but her image still filled Theodore's mind, and he left the drawing-room and the frivolous talk and the clinking of teacups and teaspoons, and went out in the declining light to walk in the avenue of sycamores on the edge of the old city.

He had not called upon his cousin in her new home; he shrank from the very idea of meeting her while her sorrow was still new, while her thoughts and feelings were concentrated upon that one subject, while he could only be to her as an unwelcome intruder from that outside world she loathed, as grief loathes all but its own sad memories.

Had the calamity which had desolated her life brought her any nearer to him who had loved her so long and so unselfishly? Alas, no; he told himself that if she ever loved again, it would be to a stranger that her reawakening heart would open rather than to the rejected lover of the past, the man whom her memory would couple with the husband she had lost, and whom she would compare disadvantageously with that chosen one.

No, he told himself, there was little more chance for him in the future than there had been in the past. She liked him and trusted him, with a sisterly affection which nothing short of a miracle could warm into love. Passion does not grow out of such placid beginnings.

In her very dawn of girlhood she had been in love with Godfrey: had blushed at his coming: had quarrelled with him, and wept stormy tears: had suffered all those alternations of joy and grief, pride and self-abasement, which accompany love in an impassioned nature. Theodore remembered her treatment of the fifth-form Etonian, of the undergraduate, remembered the passionate drama per-

petually being acted in those two young lives, a drama which he had watched with aching heart; and he felt that he could never be as that first lover had been. He was associated with the commonplace of her life. She had laughed often at his dry-as-dust talk with her father—the dull discussions about leases and bills of dilapidation. A solicitor living from year's end to year's end in a country town—what a dreary person he must needs appear beside the brilliant young Patrician, full of the gladness of the life that knows neither labour nor care. He sickened at the thought of that contrast.

He had served his father faithfully hitherto, and the bond between father and son had been one of strong affection as well as duty; but for the last year there had been growing upon him an inexpressible weariness of the house in which he was born, and the city in which he had lived the chief part of his uneventful life. He had struggled against the disgust of familiar things, telling himself that it was an unworthy feeling, and that he would be a snob if he indulged it. Yet the disgust grew into

absolute loathing; the monotonous days, the repetitive work, oppressed him like a nightmare. Since Juanita's marriage the burden had become more and more intolerable. To be so near her, yet so far. To be letting life creep away in dull drudgery which could never bring him nearer her social level; to feel that all his pursuits and associations were beneath the woman he loved, and could never arouse the faintest interest in her mind. This was almost too bitter to be borne, and he had for some time past been meditating some way of escape, some manner of release from these old fetters into the wider arena of the outer world.

Such escape was not easy. He had to think of his father, that indulgent, large-minded father who had given his son a very remunerative share in his practice at an age when most young men are dependent for every suit of clothes or five pound note upon parental bounty and parental caprice. He knew that his father looked to him for an entire release from work before they were many years older; and that he would then find himself sole master of a business worth at least fifteen hundred

a year. All this had come to him and would come to him easily, as the reward of conscientious and intelligent work. It was a prospect which few young men would forego without considerable hesitation; but Theodore hardly thought of the substantial advantages which he was so eager to sacrifice. His sole hesitation was on account of the disappointment which the step he contemplated would inflict upon his father.

He was not without a foreshadowing of a plan by which that disappointment might be in somewise lessened. He had kept an eye upon his brother for some time past, and he had discovered that the young man's fervour for the Anglican Church had begun to cool. There were all the signs of wavering in that gifted youth. At one time he devoted all his study to the writings of Cardinal Newman, Hurrel Froude, and the Tractarian Party—he lived in the atmosphere of Oxford in the forties; he talked of Cardinal Manning as the head and front of religious thought. He was on the verge of deciding for the Old Faith. Then a sudden change came over the spirit of his dream. He began to

have doubts, not of the reformed faith, but of every Western creed.

"Light comes from the East," he told his sisters with an oracular air. "I doubt if there is any nearer resting-place for the sole of my foot than the Temple of Buddha. I find there the larger creed for which my mind yearns — boundless vistas behind and before me. I begin to entertain painful doubts of my fitness for the Anglican Church. I might be a power, perhaps, but it would be outside those narrow bounds — like Voysey, or Stopford Brooke. The Church, with its present limitations, would not hold me."

The sisters sympathized, argued, quoted Essays and Reviews, and talked of Darwin and Spencer, Huxley and Comte. Theodore listened and said nothing. He saw which way the tide was turning, and rejoiced in the change of the current.

And now this sultry August afternoon, pacing up and down the green walk, he was expectant of an opportunity of discussing his brother's future with that gentleman himself, as Harrington was in the

habit of taking his afternoon constitutional, book in hand, upon this very path.

He appeared by-and-by, carrying an open volume of Max Müller and looking at the nursemaids and perambulators.

"What, Theo, taking your meditative cigar? You don't often give yourself a holiday before dinner."

"No, but I wanted to talk to you alone, and I knew this was your beat."

"Nothing gone wrong, I hope."

"No, it is your future I want to discuss—if you don't mind."

"My future is wrapped in a cloud of doubt," replied the younger man, dreamily. "Were the Church differently constituted — were the minds that rule in it of a larger cast, a wider grasp, a——"

"Harrington, how would you like the law as a profession?" Theodore asked abruptly, when the other began to hesitate.

"My dear fellow, it is all very well to ask me that question, when you know there is no room for me in my father's office," retorted Harrington, with a

contemptuous wave of that long, lean white hand, which always reminded him of St. Francis de Sales or Savonarola; not that he had any positive knowledge of what those saintly hands were like.

"Room might be made for you," said Theodore.

"I should not care to accept a subordinate position—Aut Cæsar——"

"So far as the Cæsar-ship of a provincial solicitor's office can go the whole empire may be yours by-and-by, if you like — provided you put your shoulder to the wheel and pass your examinations."

"Do you mean to say that you would throw up your position—and an income which would allow of your marrying to-morrow, if you chose—to make room for me?"

"If I can get my father's consent, yes, decidedly."

"And how do you propose to exist without a profession?"

"I don't propose anything of the kind. I mean to go to the Bar.

"Oh, I begin to understand. A solicitor's office is not good enough for you?"

"I don't say that; but I have taken a disgust—an unreasonable disgust no doubt—to that branch of the law; and I am very sick of Dorchester."

"So am I," retorted Harrington, gazing vaguely at a pretty nursemaid. "We are agreed there at any rate. And you want to follow in Lord Cheriton's track, and make a great name?"

"It is only one man in a thousand who succeeds as James Dalbrook has succeeded; but if I go to the Bar you may be sure I shall do my best to get on; and I shall start with a pretty good knowledge of common law."

"You want to be in London—you are pining for an æsthetic centre," sighed Harrington.

"I don't quite know what that is, but I should prefer London to Dorchester."

"So should I—and you want me to take your place at the mill; to grind out my soul in the dull round that has sickened you."

"The life has begun to pall upon me, but I think it ought to suit you," answered Theodore, thoughtfully. "You are fonder of home — and of the sisters—than I am. You get on better with them."

"You have been rather grumpy lately, I admit," said Harrington.

"And you have let yourself cool upon your Divinity exam. You evidently don't mean the Church?"

"I have outgrown the Church. You can't put a quart of wine into a pint bottle."

"And you must do something. I don't think you can do anything so good as to take my place, and become my father's right hand until he chooses to retire, and leave you the practice. You will have married by that time, perhaps, and will have sobered down—intellectually. Morally you are one of the steadiest fellows I know."

"I suppose I ought to consider this what the house-agents call an unusual opportunity?" said Harrington; "but you must give me time to think it over."

"Take time," answered Theodore, briefly. "I'll talk to my father in the meanwhile."

Mr. Dalbrook received his elder son's communication as if it had been a blow from an enemy's hand.

"Do you suppose that ass Harrington can ever take your place?" he exclaimed, whereupon Theodore took pains to explain that his brother was by no means an ass, and that he was only labouring under that burden of small affectations which weighs down a young man who has been allowed to live too much in the society of young women, sisters and sisters' friends, and to consider all his own utterances oracular.

"He is not so fit for the Church as Brown is," said Theodore, "and he will only addle his brains if he reads any more theology. He won't be content with Paley and Butler, and the good old books which have been the turnpike road to ordination for a century. He is all for new ideas, and the new ideas are too big for him. But if you will give him his articles, and teach him, as you taught me——"

"I don't think I taught you much. You seemed to get at everything by instinct."

"Ah, you taught me my profession without knowing it; and you will teach Harrington with just as little trouble. He will shake off that husk of affectation in your office—no solicitor can be affected—and

he will come out a good lawyer; while I am trying my luck in Temple chambers, reading, and waiting for briefs. With your help, by-and-by, I am bound to do something. I shall get a case or two upon this circuit, anyhow."

"I can't think what has put this folly in your head, Theo," said his father, with a vexed air.

"It is not folly, father; it is not a caprice," the young man protested, with sudden earnestness. "For God's sake don't think me ungrateful, or that I would willingly turn my back upon my duty to you. Only—young people have troubles of their own, don't you know?—and of late I have not been altogether happy. I have not prospered in my love-dream; and so I have set up a new idol, that idol so many men worship with more or less reward—Success. I want to spread my wings, and see if they will carry me on a longer flight than I have taken yet."

"Well, it would be selfish of me to baulk you, even if your loss were to cripple me altogether. And it won't do that. I am strong enough to work on for a few years longer than I intended."

"Oh, my dear father, I hope it won't come to that. I hope my change of plan won't shorten your years of leisure."

"I am afraid that's inevitable, Theo. I can't transfer a fine practice to my son till I've made him a good lawyer—and God knows how long that will take in Harrington's case. Judging by my present estimation of him, I should say half a century. But don't be downhearted, Theo. You shall eat your dinners. You shall qualify for the Woolsack. After all I don't know how a life of leisure might suit me. It would be a change from the known to the unknown, almost as stupendous as the change from life to death."

Perhaps Matthew Dalbrook had fathomed that secret woe at which Theodore had hinted darkly; in any case he took his elder son's defection more easily than might have been hoped, and bore patiently with some preliminary fatuity from the younger son, who accepted the gift of his articles, an allowance of two hundred pounds per annum, and the promise of a junior partnership in the near future, with the languid politeness of one who felt that he was renouncing a mitre.

Everything was settled off-hand, and Theodore was to go to London at the end of September to select and furnish his modest chambers in one of those grave old courts of the Temple, and be ready to begin his new life with the beginning of term.

He had not seen Juanita since the funeral, and she had been told nothing of this sudden reconstruction of his life; but he determined to see her before he left Dorchester, and he considered that he had a right, as her kinsman, to bid her good-bye. Perhaps in his heart-weariness he was inclined to exaggerate the solemnity of that leave-taking, somewhat as if he had been starting for Australia.

He drove over to the Priory on a dull, grey afternoon, his last day in Dorchester. His portmanteaus were packed, and all things were ready for an early departure next morning. Sorely as he had sickened of the good old town which was his birth-place, he felt a shade of melancholy at the idea of cutting himself adrift altogether from that quiet haven; and the love of those open stretches of barren heath and those swampy meadows and grazing cattle on the way to Milbrook, was engrained in him deeper

than he knew. It was a landscape which took a peculiar charm from the grey dimness of an autumnal atmosphere, and it seemed to Theodore Dalbrook that those level pastures and winding waters had never looked fairer than they looked to-day.

He had written to his cousin a day before to tell her of his intended visit. It was too solemn a matter in his own mind for him to leave the finding her at home to chance. His groom took the dog-cart round to the stables, while he was ushered at once to the drawing-room where Lady Carmichael was sitting at her work-table in the bow window, with Styx stretched on a lion-skin at her feet.

The silence of the house struck Theodore Dalbrook painfully as he followed the footman across the hall and along a corridor which led to the drawing-room—that death-like silence of a roomy old mansion in which there are neither children nor guests, only one lonely inhabitant waited upon by solemn-visaged servants, drilled to a phenomenal quietness, and keeping all their good spirits for the remoteness of the servants' hall, shut off by double

doors and long passages. Saddened by that atmosphere of gloom, he entered his cousin's presence, and stood with her small cold hand in his, looking at the face which had changed so sorely from that vivid beauty which had shone upon him in the low light of the sinking sun on that summer evening not three months ago.

As he looked the memory of the bride's face came between him and the face of the widow, and for a moment or two he stood speechless. The clearly-cut features were pinched and sharpened, wasted by long nights of weeping and long days of silent regret. The dark eyes were circled by purple shadows, and the oval cheeks were sunken and pallid. All the colour and richness of that southern beauty had vanished, as if some withering blight had passed over the face.

"It was very good of you to think of me before you left Dorchester," she said, gently.

She pushed forward a chair for her cousin, before she sat down; and Theodore seated himself opposite to her with the wicker work-table between them. He wondered a little to see that satin-lined re-

ceptacle gorged with bright coloured silks, and pieces of unfinished embroidery; for it seemed to him that there was a touch of frivolity in this light ornamental needle-work which hardly harmonized with her grief-stricken countenance.

"You could not suppose that I should leave without seeing you," he said; "I should have come here weeks ago, only——"

"Only you wanted to give me time to grow calm, to teach myself to look my trouble straight in the face," she said, interpreting his thought. "That was very thoughtful of you. Well, the storm is over now. I am quite calm, as you see. I daresay some people think I am *getting over it*. That is the usual phrase, is it not? And so you are going to the Bar, Theodore. I am glad of that. You are clever enough to make a name as my father did. It will be slow work, I suppose; but it will be a field worthy of your ambition, which a solicitor's office in a market-town never would be."

"I have felt the want of a wider field for a long time; and I shall feel more interest in a barrister's work. But I hope you don't think I am con-

ceited enough to expect to get on as well as your father."

"I don't know about that. I think you must know you are a clever man. I have been wishing to see you for a long time, Theodore, only I was like you, I wanted to give myself time to be calm. I want to talk to you about—the murderer."

"Yes. Have you heard anything? Has there been any discovery?"

"Nothing. The offer of a reward has resulted in nothing—not one little scrap of information. The London detective gave up the business and went back to town a week after the funeral, having obtained only negative results. The police hereabouts are creatures without an idea; and so unless something is done, unless some clever brain can solve the riddle, the wretch who killed my husband may go down to the grave unpunished."

"It is hard that it should be so," said Theodore, quietly, "yet it is an almost impossible case. There is not a single indication so far to put one on the track—not one little clue."

"Not for these dull-brained, mechanical dis-

coverers, perhaps; but for you or me, Theo; for us who loved him there ought to be light. Think, what a strange murder it was. Not for gain, remember. Had it been the hand of a burglar that shot him, I could understand the difficulty of tracing that particular criminal among all the criminal classes. But *this* murder, which seems utterly motiveless, must have been prompted by some extraordinary motive. It was not the act of a maniac; a maniac must have left some trace of his presence in the neighbourhood. A maniac could not have so completely eluded the police on the alert to hunt him down. There must have been some indication."

"Put madness out of the question, Juanita, what then?"

"Hatred, Theodore. That is the strongest passion in the human mind—a savage hatred which could not be satisfied except with the brightest life that it had the power to destroy—a relentless hatred—not against him, not against my beloved. What had he done in all his good life that any one upon this earth should hate *him*. But against us—against my father and mother and me—the usurpers,

the owners of Cheriton Manor; against us who have thrust ourselves upon the soil which that wicked race held so long. Oh, Theodore, I have thought and thought of this, till the conviction has grown into my mind—till it has seemed like a revelation from God. It was one of that wicked family who struck this blow."

"One of your predecessors—the Strangways? Is that what you mean, Nita?"

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"My dear Juanita, it is too wild an idea. What, after your father has owned the estate nearly a quarter of a century? Why should the enemy wait all those years—and choose such a time?"

"Because there never before was such an opportunity of striking a blow that should bring ruin upon us. My father's hope of making his son-in-law his successor in the peerage was known to a good many people. It may easily have reached the ears of the Strangways."

"My dear girl, the family has died off like rotten sheep. I doubt if there are any survivors of the old race."

"Oh, but families are not obliterated so easily. There is always some one left. There were two sons and a daughter of the old squire's. Surely one of those must have left children."

"But, Juanita, to suppose that any man could hate the purchaser of his squandered estate with a hatred malignant enough for murder is to imagine humanity akin to devils."

"We are akin to devils," cried Juanita, excitedly. "I felt that I could rejoice as the devils rejoice at human suffering if I could see my husband's murderer tortured. Yes, if he were tied against a tree, as Indian savages tie their sacrificial victims—tied against a tree and killed by inches, with every variety of torture which a hellish ingenuity can suggest, I would say my litany, like those savages, my litany of triumph and content. Yes, Theodore, we have more in common with the devils than you may think."

"I cannot see the possibility of murder, prompted by such an inadequate motive," said Theodore, slowly, remembering, as he spoke, how Churton had suggested that the crime looked like a vendetta.

"Inadequate! Ah, that depends, don't you see. Remember, we have not to deal with good people. The Strangways were always an evil race. Almost every tradition that remains about their lives is a story of wrong-doing. And think how small a wound may be deadly when the blood has poison in it beforehand. And is it a small thing to see strangers in a home that has been in one's family for three centuries? Again, remember that although nothing throve on the Cheriton Estate while the Strangways held it—or at any rate not for the last hundred years of their holding—no sooner was my father in possession than the luck changed. Quarries were developed; land that had been almost worthless became valuable for building. Everything has prospered with him. And think of them outside—banished for ever, like Adam and Eve out of Paradise. Think of them with hate and envy gnawing their hearts."

"There would be time for them to get over that feeling in four-and-twenty years. And when you talk about *them*, I should like to know exactly whom you mean. I assure you the general idea is

that they have all died off. That is to say, all of the direct line."

"It is upon that very subject I want to talk to you, Theodore. Would you like to do me a service, a very great service?"

"Nothing would make me happier."

"Then will you try to find out all about the Strangways—if they are really all gone, or if there are not some survivors, or a survivor, of the last squire's family? If you can do that much it will be something gained. We shall know better what to think. When I heard that you were going to live in London, it flashed into my mind that you would be just the right person to help me, and I knew how good you had been to me always, and that you *would* help. London is the place in which to make your inquiries. I have heard my father say that all broken lives—all doubtful characters—gravitate towards London. It is the one place where people fancy they can hide."

"I will do everything in my power to realize your wish, Juanita. I shall be a solitary man with a good deal of leisure, so I ought to succeed, if success be possible."

They were silent for some few minutes, Juanita being exhausted with the passionate vehemence of her speech. She took up a piece of embroidery from the basket, and began, with slow, careful stitches, upon the petal of a dog rose.

"I am glad to see you engaged upon that artistic embroidery," said Theodore, presently, for the sake of saying something.

"That means perhaps that you wonder I can care for such frivolous work as this," she said, interpreting his recent thought, when his eyes first lighted on her satin-lined basket with its rainbow-hued silks. "It seems inconsistent, I dare say; but this work has helped me to quiet my brain many a time when I have felt myself on the brink of madness. These slow regular stitches, the mechanical movement of my hand as the flowers grow gradually, stitch by stitch, through the long melancholy day, have quieted my nerves. I cannot read. Books give me no comfort, for my eyes follow the page while my mind is brooding on my own troubles. It is better to sit and think quietly, while I work. It is better to face my sorrow."

"Have you been long alone?"

"No. It is only three weeks since Lady Jane went back to Swanage; and she comes to see me two or three times a week. My father and mother come as often. You must not think I am deserted. Every one is very good to me."

"They have need to be."

Again there was a brief interval of silence, and then Juanita closed her basket, and lifted her earnest eyes to her cousin's face.

"You know all about the Strangways?" she inquired.

"I have heard a good deal about them from one and another. People who live in the country have long memories, and are fond of talking of the lords of the soil, even when the race has vanished from the land. I have heard elderly men tell their after-dinner stories about the Strangways at my father's table."

"You know the family portraits at Cheriton?"

"The pictures in the hall? Yes. I have wondered sometimes that your father should have kept them there—effigies of an alien race."

"I hate them," exclaimed Juanita, shuddering. "I always had an uncomfortable feeling about them, a feeling of strange cold eyes looking at us in secret enmity; but now I abhor them. There is a girl's face—a cruel face—that I used rather to admire when I was a child, and sometimes dream about; and on the last night but one—of—my happy life—I looked at that picture with Godfrey, and told him my feeling about that face, and he told me the pitiful story of the girl whose portrait we were looking at. The creature had a sad life, and died in France, poor and broken-hearted. Two hours later I heard a strange step upon the terrace—while Godfrey and I were sitting in the library—a stealthy, creeping step, coming near one of the open windows, and then creeping away again. When we looked out there was no one to be seen."

"And this was the night before—Sir Godfrey's death?"

"Yes. I told my father about it—after—after my trouble; and when he questioned the gardeners he discovered that footprints had been seen by one of them on the damp gravel the morning after I

heard that ghost-like step. They were strange footprints the man was sure, or he would not have noticed them—the prints of a shoe with a flat heel —not of a large foot—but they were not very distinct, and he went over them with his roller, and rolled them out, and thought no more about the fact till my father questioned him. The next day was dry and warm, as you know, and the gravel was hard next night. There were no footprints seen—afterwards."

"Did the gardener trace those marks beyond the terrace—to the avenue, for instance? "

"Not he. All he did was to roll them out with his iron-roller."

"They suggest one point—that the murderer may have been lurking about on the night before the crime."

"I am sure of it. That footstep would not have frightened me if there had been no meaning in it. I felt as a Scotchman does when he has seen the shadow of the shroud round his friend's figure. It is a point for you to remember, Theodore; if you mean to help me."

"I do mean to help you."

"God bless you for that promise," she cried, giving him her hand, "and if you want any further information about the Strangways there is some one here who may be useful. Godfrey's old bailiff, Jasper Blake, lived over ten years at Cheriton. He only left there when the Squire died, and he almost immediately entered the service of Godfrey's father. If you can stay till the evening I will send for him, and you can ask him as many questions as you like."

"I will stay. There is a moon rather late in the evening, and I shall be able to get back any time before midnight. But, Juanita, as an honest man, I am bound to tell you that I believe you are following an *ignis fatuus*—you are influenced by prejudices and fancies, rather than by reason."

CHAPTER X.

"The snow
Of her sweet coldness hath extinguished quite
The fire that but even now began to flame."

Theodore Dalbrook, a sensible, hard-headed man of business, was like a puppet in his cousin's hands. She told him to toil for her, and he deemed himself privileged to be allowed so to labour. She put him upon that which, according to his own conviction, was an absolutely false track, and he was compelled to follow it. She bade him think with her thoughts, and he bent his mind to hers.

Yes, she was right perhaps. It was a vendetta. Lord Cheriton had lived all these years hemmed round with unseen, unsuspected foes. They had not burned his ricks, or tried to burn his dwelling-house; they had not slandered him to the neighbourhood in anonymous letters; they had not poisoned his dogs or his pheasants. Such petty

malevolence had been too insignificant for them. But they had waited till his fortunes had reached their apogee, till his only child had grown from bud to flower and he had wedded her to an estimable young man of patrician lineage and irreproachable character. And, just when fate was fairest the cowardly blow had been struck—a blow that blighted one young life, and darkened those two other lives sloping towards the grave, the lives of father and mother, rendered desolate because of their daughter's desolation.

Mastered by that will which was his law, the will of the woman he loved, Theodore began to believe as she believed, or at least to think it just possible that there might be amongst the remnant of the Strangway race a man so lost and perverted, so soured by poverty, so envenomed by disgraces and mortifications, eating slowly into the angry heart, like rust into iron, that he had become at last the very incarnation of malignity—hating the man who had prospered while he had failed, hating the owner of his people's forfeited estate as if that owner had robbed them of it—hating with so passionate a

malevolence that nothing less than murder could appease his wrath. Yes, there might be such a man. In the history of mankind there have been such crimes. They are not common in England, happily; but among the Celtic nations they are not uncommon.

"My first brief," mused Theodore, with a grim smile, as he walked up and down the drawing-room while his cousin was writing a memorandum requesting the bailiff's presence. "It is more like a case entrusted to a detective than submitted to counsel's opinion; but it will serve to occupy my mind while I am eating my dinners. My poor Juanita! Will her loss seem less, I wonder, when she has discovered the hand that widowed her?"

He dined with his cousin at a small round table in the spacious dining-room which had held so many cheerful gatherings in the years that were gone: the sisters and their husbands, and the sisters' friends; and Godfrey's college friends; and those old friends of the neighbourhood who seemed only a little less than kindred, by reason of his having known them all his life. And now these two were

sitting here alone, and the corners of the room were full of shadows. One large circular lamp suspended over the table was the only light, the carving being done in a serving-room adjoining.

Juanita was too hospitable to allow the meal to be silent or gloomy. She put aside the burden of her grief and talked to her cousin of his family and of his own prospects; and she seemed warmly interested in his future success. It was but a sisterly interest, he knew, frankly expressed as a sister's might have been; yet it was sweet to him nevertheless, and he talked freely of his plans and hopes.

"I felt stifled in that old street," he told her. "A man must be very happy to endure life in a country town."

"But you are not unhappy, Theodore?" she interrupted, wonderingly.

"Unhappy—no, that would be too much to say, perhaps. You know how fond I am of my father. I was glad to work with him, and to feel that I was useful to him; but that feeling was not enough to reconcile me to the monotony of my days. A man who has home ties—a wife and children—may be

satisfied in that narrow circle ; but for a young man with his life before him it is no better than a prison."

"I understand," said Juanita, eagerly. "I can fully sympathize with you. I am very glad you are ambitious, Theodore. A man is worthless who is without ambition. And now tell me what you will do when you go to London. How will you begin?"

"I shall put up at the Inns of Court Hotel for a few days while I look about for a suitable set of chambers, and when I have found them and furnished them, and brought my books and belongings from Dorchester, I shall sit down and read law. I can read while I am qualifying for the Bar. I shall go on reading after I have qualified. My life will be to sit in chambers and read law books until someone brings me business. It hardly sounds like a brilliant career, does it?"

"All beginnings are hard," she answered, gently. "I suppose my father went through just the same kind of drudgery when he began?"

"Well, yes, he must have gone upon the same lines, I fancy. There is no royal road."

"And while you are studying law and waiting for briefs, will you have time to look after my interests?"

"Yes, Juanita. Your interest shall be my first thought always. If it can make you happier to discover your husband's murderer——"

"Happier! It is the only thing that can reconcile me to the burden of living."

"If it is for your happiness, you need not fear that I shall ever relax in my endeavours. I may fail,—indeed, I fear I must fail,—but it shall not be for the lack of earnestness or perseverance."

"I knew that you would help me," she said, fervently, holding out her hand to him across the table.

Dinner was over, and they were alone, with the grapes and peaches of the Priory hothouses, which were not even second to those of Cheriton, unheeded upon the table before them.

"Blake is in the house by this time, I daresay," said Juanita presently. "Would you like to see him here, and shall I stay, or would you rather talk to him alone?"

"I had better take him in hand alone. It is always hard work to get straight answers out of that sort of man, and any cross current distracts him. His thoughts are always ready to go off at a tangent."

"He knows all about the Squire's children. He can give you any particulars you want about them."

The butler came into the room five minutes afterwards with the coffee, and announced the bailiff's arrival.

Juanita rose at once, and left her cousin to receive Jasper Blake alone.

He came into the room with rather a sheepish air. He was about sixty, young looking for his age, with a bald forehead, and stubbly iron grey hair, and a little bit of whisker on each sunburnt cheek. He had the horsey look still, though he had long ceased to have anything to do with horses beyond buying and selling cart-horses for the home farm, and occasionally exhibiting a prize animal in that line. He was a useful servant, and a thoroughly honest man, of the old-fashioned order.

"Mr. Blake, I want you to give me some information about old friends of yours. I have a little

business in hand, which indirectly concerns the Strangway family, and I want to be quite clear in my own mind as to how many are left of them, and where they are to be found."

The bailiff rubbed one of his stunted whiskers meditatively, and shook his head.

"There was never many of 'em to leave, sir," he said, grumpily, "and I don't believe there's any of 'em left anywheres. There seems to have been a curse upon 'em, for the last hundred years. Nothing ever throve with them. Look at what Cheriton is now, and what it was in their time."

"I didn't know it in their time, Mr. Blake."

"Ah, you're not old enough; but your father knew the place. He did business for the old Squire —till things got too bad—mortgages, and accommodation bills, and overdrawn accounts at the bank, and such like, and your father washed his hands of the business—a long-headed gentleman, your father. He can tell you what Cheriton was like in the Squire's time."

"Why do you suppose the Strangways are all dead and gone?"

"Well, sir, first and foremost it's fifteen years and more since I've heard of any of 'em, and the last I heard was about as bad as bad could be."

"What was that last report?"

"It was about Master Reginald—that was the eldest son, him that was colonel of a Lancer regiment, and married Lord Dangerfield's youngest daughter. I remember the bonfires on the hills out by Studlands just as if it happened yesterday, but it's more than forty years ago, and I was a boy in the stables at fourteen shillings a week."

"Reginald, the elder son, colonel of Lancers, married Lord Dangerfield's daughter—about 1840," wrote Theodore in a pocket-book which he held ready for taking notes.

"What was it you heard about him?" he asked.

"Well, sir, it was Mr. de Lacy's servant that told me. He'd been somewhere in the south with his master where there was gambling—a place where the folks make a regular trade of it. It's a wonderful climate, says Mr. de Lacy's man, and the gentry go there for their health, and very often finish by shooting themselves, and it seems Colonel

Strangway was there. He'd come over from Corsica, which it seems was in the neighbourhood—where he'd left his poor wife all among brigands and savages —and he was at the tables day and night, and he had a wonderful run of luck, so that they called him the king of the place, and it was who but he? Howsoever the tide turned suddenly, and he began losing, and he lost his last sixpence, in a manner of speaking regular cleaned out, Mr. de Lacy's man said; and by-and-by there comes another gentleman, a Jewish gentleman from Paris, rolling in money, and playing for the sake of the science, and able to hold out where another man must have given in; and in a week or two *he* was the king of the place, and the Colonel was nowhere, just living on tick at the hotel, and borrowing a fiver from Mr. de Lacy or any other old acquaintance whenever he had the chance, and making as much play as he could with two or three cart wheels, where he used to play with hundred franc pieces. And so it went on, and he cut up uncommon rough when anybody happened to offend him, and there was more than one row at the hotel or in the gardens—they don't allow no

rows in the gambling rooms—and just as the season was coming to an end the Colonel went off one afternoon to catch the boat for Corsica. The boat was to start after dark from Nice, and there was a lot of traffic in the port, but not as much light as there ought to have been, and the Colonel missed his footing in going from the quay to the boat, and went to the bottom like a plummet. Some people thought he made away with himself on purpose, and that the one sensible thing he did was to make it look like accident, so as not to vitiate the insurance on his life, which Lord Dangerfield had taken care of, and had paid the premiums ever since the Colonel began to go to the bad. Anyhow, he never came up again alive out of that water. His death was published in the papers: 'Accidentally drowned at Nice.' I should never have known the rights or the wrongs of it if Mr. de Lacy hadn't happened to be visiting here soon afterwards.

"Did Colonel Strangway leave no children?"

"Neither chick nor child."

"Do you know if his widow is still living?"

"No, sir. That is the last I ever heard of him or his."

"What about the younger brother?"

"I believe he must be dead too, though I can't give you chapter and verse. He never married, didn't Mr. Frederick—not to my knowledge. He went on board a man-of-war before he was fifteen, and at five-and-twenty he was a splendid officer and as fine a young man as you need wish to see; but he was too fond of the bottle. China was the ruin of him, some folks said, and he got court-marshalled out there, not long after they sacked that there Summer Palace there was so much talk about; and then he contrived to pass into the mercantile marine, which was a come-down for a Strangway, and for a few years he was one of their finest officers, a regular dare-devil; could sail a ship faster and safer than any man in the service; used to race home with the spring pickings of tea, when tea wasn't the cheap muck it is now, and when there weren't no Suez Canal to spoil sport. But he took to his old games again, and he got broke again, broke for drunkenness and insubordination; and then he went and loafed and drank in Jersey—where, it's my belief, he died some years ago."

"You have no positive information about his death?"

"I can't say that I have."

"There was one daughter, I think?"

"Yes, there was a daughter, Miss Eva. I taught her to ride. There wasn't a finer horsewoman in Dorsetshire, but a devil of a temper—the real Strangway temper. I wasn't surprised when I heard she'd married badly; I wasn't surprised when I heard she'd run away from her husband."

"Did she leave any children?"

"No, not by him."

"But afterwards—do you know if there were children?"

"I can't say that I do. She was living in Boulogne when I last heard of her, and somebody told me afterwards that she died there."

"That's vague. She may be living still."

"I don't think that's likely. It's more than ten years—ay, it's nearer fifteen—since I heard of her death. She was not the kind of woman to hide her light under a bushel for a quarter of a century. If she were alive I feel sure we should

have heard of her at Cheriton. Lord! how fond she was of the place, and how proud she was of her good looks and her old name, and how haughty and overbearing she was with every other young woman that ever came in her way."

"She must have been a remarkably disagreeable young person, I take it."

"Well, not altogether, sir. She had a taking way when she wasn't in her tantrums, and she was very good to the poor people about Cheriton. *They* doated upon her. She never quarrelled with them. It was with her father she got on worst. Those two never could hit it off. They were too much alike; and at last, when she was close upon seventeen, and a regular clipper, things got so bad that the Squire packed off the governess at an hour's warning. She was too young and silly to manage such a pupil as Miss Strangway, and it's my belief she sided with her in all her mischief, and made things worse. He turned her out of doors neck and crop, and a week afterwards he took his daughter up to London and handed her over to an English lady, who kept a finishing

school somewhere abroad, at a place called Losun."

"At Lausanne, I think."

"Yes, that was the name. She was to stay there for a year, and then she was to have another year's schooling in Paris to finish her; but she never got to Paris, didn't Miss Eva. She ran off from Lausanne with a lieutenant in a marching regiment, and her father never saw her face again. He had no money to give her if she had married ever so well, but he took a pride in striking her name out of his will all the same."

"What was her husband's name?"

"Darcy—Tom Darcy. He was an Irishman, and I've heard he treated her very badly."

"Do you know how long it was after her marriage that she left him?"

"I only know when I heard they were parted, and that was six or seven years after she ran away from Lausanne."

"How long was that before the Squire's death and the sale of the estate?"

"Nearly ten years, I should say."

"That makes it about thirty-four years ago?"

"Yes, that's about it."

Theodore noted down the date in his book. He had heard all these things before now—loosely, and in a disjointed fashion—never having been keenly interested in the vicissitudes of the Strangways.

"Who was the man who took her away from her husband?"

"God knows," said Jasper. "None of us at Cheriton ever heard. We fancied he must have been a Frenchman, for she was heard of afterwards—a good many years afterwards—at Boulogne. Our old Vicar saw her there the year before he died—it must have been as late as sixty-four or sixty-five, I fancy—a wreck, he said. He wouldn't have recognized her if she hadn't spoken to him, and she had to tell him who she was. I heard him tell my old master all about it, one summer afternoon at the Vicarage gate, when Sir Godfrey had driven over to see him. Yes, it must have been as late as sixty-five, I believe."

"Five years after Lord Cheriton bought the estate?"

"About that."

"Do you remember the name of Miss Strangway's governess? Of course, you do, though."

The bailiff rubbed his iron grey whisker with a puzzled air.

"My memory's got to be like a corn-sieve of late years," he said, "but I ought to remember her name. She was at Cheriton over four years, and I only wish I had a guinea for every time I've sat behind her and Miss Strangway in the pony chaise. She was a light-hearted, good-tempered young woman, but she hadn't bone enough for her work. She wasn't up to Miss Strangway's weight. Let me see now—what was that young woman's name? —she was a good-looking girl, sandy, with a high colour and a freckled skin. I ought to remember."

"Take a glass of claret, Mr. Blake, and take your time. The name will come back to you. Have you ever heard of the lady since she left Cheriton?"

"Never—she wasn't likely to come back to this part of the world after having been turned out neck and crop, as she was. What was the name of the

man who saw the apple fall?—Newton—that was it, Sarah Newton. Miss Strangway used to call her Sally. I remember that."

"Do you know where she came from, or what her people were?"

"She came from somewhere near London, and it's my opinion her father kept a shop; but she was very close about her home and her relatives."

"And she was young, you say?"

"Much too young for the place. She couldn't have been five-and-twenty when she left; and a girl like Miss Strangway, a motherless girl, wanted some one older and wiser to keep her in order."

"Had the Squire's wife been long dead at that time?"

"She died before I went to service at Cheriton. Miss Eva couldn't have been much above seven years old when she lost her mother."

Theodore asked no more questions, not seeing his way to extracting any further information from the bailiff. He had been acquainted with most of these facts before, or had heard them talked about. The handsome daughter who ran away from a

foreign school with a penniless subaltern—the Strangway temper, and the pitched battles between the spendthrift father and the motherless unmanageable girl—the life-long breach, and then a life of poverty and an untimely death in a strange city, only vaguely known, yet put forward as a positive and established fact. He had heard all this: but the old servant's recollections helped him to tabulate his facts—helped him, too, with the name of the governess, which might be of some use in enabling him to trace the story of the last of the Strangways.

"If there is any ground for Juanita's theory, I think the man most likely to have done the deed would be the Colonel of Lancers, supposed to be drowned at Nice. If I were by any means to discover that the story of the drowning was a mistake, and that the Colonel is in the land of the living, I should be inclined to adopt Juanita's view of the murder."

He encouraged the bailiff to take a second glass of claret, and talked over local interests with him for ten minutes or so, while his dog-cart was being

brought round; and then, Mr. Blake having withdrawn, he went to the drawing-room where Juanita was sitting at work by a lamp-lit table, and wished her good night.

"Did you find Jasper intelligent?" she asked, eagerly.

"Very intelligent."

"And did you find out all you wanted from him?"

"Not quite all. He told me very little that I did not know before; but there were one or two facts that may be useful. Good night, Nita, good night, and good-bye."

"Not for long," she answered. "You will spend Christmas at home, of course."

"Yes, I shall go home for the Christmas week, I suppose."

"You will have something to tell me by that time, perhaps. You will be on the track."

"Don't be too sanguine, Nita. I will do my uttermost."

"I am sure you will. Ah, you don't know how I trust you, how I lean upon you. God bless you,

Theodore. You are my strong rock. I, who never had a brother, turn to you as a sister might. If you can do this thing for me—if you can avenge his cruel death——"

"If—what then, Juanita?" he asked, paling suddenly, and his eyes flaming.

"I shall honour—esteem you—as I have never done yet, and you know I have always looked up to you, Theodore. God bless and prosper you. Good night."

Her speech, kind as it was, fell upon his enthusiasm like ice. He was holding both her hands, almost crushing them unawares in his vehemence. Then his grip loosened all at once, he bent his head, gently kissed those slender hands, muttered a husky good night, and hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XI.

"The God of love—*ah, benedicite!*
How mighty and how great a Lord is he!"

A WEEK later Theodore Dalbrook was established in chambers on the second floor of No. 2, Ferret Court, Temple.

Ferret Court is one of the few places in the Temple which have not been improved and beautified out of knowledge within the last thirty years. The architect and the sanitary engineer have passed by on the other side, and have left Ferret Court to its original shabbiness. Its ceilings have not been elevated, or its windows widened, nor has the Early-English stone front replaced the shabby old brickwork. Its time has not come. The rooms are small and low, the queer old closets where generations of lawyers have kept their goods and chattels are dark and redolent of mice. The staircases are rotten, the heavy old ballusters are black with age,

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and the deep old window seats are set in windows of the early Georgian era.

The chambers suited Theodore, first because they were cheap, and next because the sitting-room, which was at the back, commanded a good view of the river. The bedroom was a tolerable size, and there was a dressing-room just big enough to hold bath and boots. He furnished the rooms comfortably, with solid old-fashioned furniture, partly consisting of surplus articles sent from the old house in Dorchester, and partly of his own purchases in London. The rooms were arranged with a sober taste which was by no means inartistic, and there was just enough bright colouring in the Algerian portières and a few handsome pieces of Oriental crockery to relieve the dark tones of old oak and Spanish mahogany. Altogether the chambers had the established look of a nest which was meant to last through wind and weather, a shelter in which a man expected to spend a good many years of his life.

He had another reason for choosing those old rooms in Ferret Court in preference to chambers in any of those new and commodious houses in the

courts that had been rebuilt of late years. It was in this house that James Dalbrook had begun his legal career; it was here, on the ground floor, that the future Lord Cheriton had waited for briefs nearly forty years ago; and it was here that fame and fortune had first visited him, a shining apparition, bringing brightness into the shabby old rooms, irradiating the gloomy old court with the glory of triumphant ambition, hopes suddenly realized, the consciousness of victory. James Dalbrook had occupied those dingy chambers fifteen years, and long after he became a great man, and he had gone from them almost reluctantly to a spacious first-floor in King's Bench Walk. He had enjoyed the reputation of a miser at that period of his life. He was never known to give a dinner to a friend; he lived in a close retirement which his enemies stigmatized as a hole-and-corner life; he was never seen at places of amusement; he never played cards, or bet upon a race. Socially he was unpopular.

Theodore had taken all the preliminary steps, and had arranged to read with a well-known special pleader. He was thoroughly in earnest in his deter-

mination to succeed in this new line. He wanted to prove to his father that his abandonment of the Dorchester office was neither a caprice nor a folly. He was even more in earnest in his desire to keep his promise to his cousin Juanita.

Almost his first act upon arriving in London had been to go to Scotland Yard in the hope of finding the detective who had been sent to Cheriton, and his inquiries there were so far successful that he was able to make an appointment with Mr. Churton for the next day but one.

He had talked with Churton after the adjourned inquest, and had heard all that the professional intellect had to offer in the way of opinion at that time; but he thought it worth his while to find out if the detective's ideas had taken any new development upon subsequent reflection, and also to submit Juanita's theory to professional consideration. He was not one of those amateurs who think that they are cleverer at a trade than the man who has served a long apprenticeship to it.

"Have you thought anything more about the Cheriton murder since last July, Mr. Churton?" he

asked; "or has your current work been too engrossing to give you time for thought?"

"No, sir. I've had plenty of other cases to think about, but I'm not likely to forget such a case as that at Cheriton, a case in which I was worsted more completely than I have been in anything for the last ten years. I've thought about it a good bit, I can assure you, Mr. Dalbrook."

"And do you see any new light?"

"No, sir. I stick pretty close to my original opinion. Sir Godfrey Carmichael was murdered by somebody that bore a grudge against him; and there's a woman at the bottom of it."

"Why a woman? Might not a man's hatred be deadly enough to lead to murder?"

"Not unless he was egged on by a woman; or had been jilted by a woman; or was jealous of a woman; or thought he had a woman's wrongs to avenge."

"Is that what your experience teaches you, Mr. Churton?"

"Yes, Mr. Dalbrook, that is what my experience teaches me."

"And you think it was an enemy of Sir Godfrey's who fired that shot?"

"I do."

"Do you think the enemy was a woman—the hand that pulled the trigger a woman's hand?"

"No, I do not. A woman couldn't have been about the place without being remarked—or got clear off, as a man might."

"There are the servants. Could the murderer be one of them?"

"I don't think so, sir. I've taken stock of them all—stables—lodges—everywhere. I never met with such a superior set of servants. The person at the west lodge is a lady bred and born, I should say. She gave me a good deal of information about the household. I consider her a remarkably intelligent woman, and I know she is of my opinion as to the motive of the murder."

"And yet if I tell you that Sir Godfrey had not an enemy in the world?" said Theodore, dwelling on the main point, and not particularly interested in what the highly-intelligent Mrs. Porter might have said upon the subject.

"I should tell you, sir, that no man can answer for another man. There is something in the lives of most of us that we would rather keep dark."

"I don't believe there was any dark spot in Sir Godfrey's life. But what if there were an enemy of Lord Cheriton's—a man who has been a judge is in a fair way to have made enemies—a foe vindictive enough to strike at him through his son-in-law, to smite him by destroying his daughter's happiness? She is his only child, remember, and all his hopes and ambitions centre in her."

"Well, Mr. Dalbrook, if there was such a man he would be an out-and-out blackguard."

"Yes, it would be a refinement of cruelty—a Satanic hate; but such a man might exist. Remember the murder of Lord Mayo—one of the wisest and most beloved of India's rulers. The wretch who killed him had never seen his face till the day of the murder. He thought himself unjustly condemned, and he killed the man who represented the Power which condemned him. Might not some wrong-headed Englishman have the same vindictive feeling against an English judge?"

"Yes, it is possible, no doubt."

"My cousin, Lady Carmichael, has another theory."

Theodore explained the positions of Lord Cheriton and the race that preceded him as owners of the soil, and Juanita's suspicion of some unknown member of the Strangway family; but the detective rejected this notion as unworthy of professional consideration.

"It is like a young lady to get such an idea into her head," he said. "If the estate had changed hands yesterday—well, even then I shouldn't suspect the former owners of wanting to murder the purchaser's son-in-law; but when you reflect that Lord Cheriton has been in peaceful possession of the property for more than twenty years the idea isn't worth a moment's thought. What put such a fancy into the lady's head, do you think, Mr. Dalbrook?"

"Grief! She has brooded upon her loss until her sorrow has taken strange shapes. She thinks that it is her duty to help in bringing her husband's murderer to justice. She has racked her brains to

discover the motive of that cruel crime. She has conjured up the image of incarnate hatred, and she calls that image by the name of Strangway. I have pledged myself to act upon this idea of hers as if it were inspiration, and the first part of my task will be to find out any surviving member of Squire Strangway's family. He only left three children, so the task ought not to be impossible."

"You don't mean, sir, that you are going to act upon the young lady's theory?"

"I do mean it, Mr. Churton, and I want you to help me; or at any rate to give me a lesson. How am I to begin?"

He laid his facts before the detective, reading over the notes which he had elaborated from Jasper Blake's reminiscences and from his own recollection of various conversations in which the Strangways had figured.

Churton listened attentively, nodded, or shook his head occasionally, and was master of every detail after that one hearing.

"Jersey is not a large place. If I were following up this inquiry I should go first for the son who

is supposed to have died in Jersey," he said, when he had heard all. "I should follow that line as far as it goes, and then I should hunt up the particulars of the Colonel's death, the gentleman who was drowned at Nice. If any Strangway had a hand in the business, it must have been one of those two, or the son of one of them. But I tell you plainly, Mr. Dalbrook, that I don't put any faith in that poor lady's notion—no, not that much," said the detective, snapping his fingers contemptuously.

"Yet it was you yourself who first mooted the idea of a vendetta."

"So it was; but I didn't mean a vendetta on such grounds as that. An estate changes hands, and—after twenty years and more—the original holders try to murder the son-in-law of the purchaser! That won't hold water, sir. There's not enough human passion in it. I've had to study humanity, Mr. Dalbrook. It's been a part of my profession, and perhaps I've studied human nature closer than many a philosopher who sits in his library and writes a book about it. Now, there's no human nature in that notion of Lady Carmichael's.

A man may be very savage because his spendthrift father has squandered his estate, and he may feel savage with the lucky man who bought and developed that estate, and may envy him in his enjoyment of it—but he won't nurse his wrath for nearly a quarter of a century, and then give expression to his feelings all at once with a revolver. *That* isn't human nature."

"How about the exception to every rule? Might not this be an exceptional case?"

"It might, of course. There's no truer saying than that fact is stranger than fiction; but for all that, this notion of Lady Carmichael's is a young lady's notion, and it belongs to fiction and not to fact. I wouldn't waste my time upon it, if I were you, Mr. Dalbrook."

"I must keep my promise, Mr. Churton. I am obliged to you for your plain speaking, and I am inclined to agree with you; but I have made a promise, and I must keep it."

"Naturally, sir; and if in the course of your inquiries I can be of any use to you, I shall be very glad to co-operate."

"I rely on your help. Remember there is a handsome reward to be earned by you if you can bring about the discovery of the murderer. My part in the search will count for nothing."

"I understand, sir. That's a stimulus, no doubt; but I hardly wanted it. When a case baffles me as this case has done, I would work day and night, and live on bread and water for a month, to get at the rights of it. Good-day. You've got my private address, and you can wire me anywhen."

"You're a Sussex man, Mr. Churton, I fancy?"

"Born in the village of Bramber."

Theodore left Waterloo the following evening, and landed at St. Heliers on the following morning an hour or so before noon. He landed on the island as an absolute stranger, and with the vaguest idea of the work that lay before him, but with the determination to lose no time in beginning that work. He sent his valise to Brett's Hotel, and he walked along the pier to the town, and inquired his way to the Police Office. He was not going in quest of

information about a member of the criminal classes; but the man he was hunting had been a notorious drunkard, and it seemed to him that in a small settlement like St. Heliers such a man would have been likely to attract the attention of the police at some stage of his downward career.

The first official whom Theodore interrogated had never heard of the name of Strangway in the island; but an elderly inspector appearing presently upon the scene, and listening attentively to the conversation, made a suggestion.

"You say the gentleman was fond of drink, sir, and in that case he'd be likely to have his favourite public, where they'd know all about him. Now, there are not so many taverns in St. Heliers where a sea-captain, and a broken-down gentleman, would care to enjoy himself. He wouldn't go to a low place, you see; and he wouldn't fancy a swell place. It would be some house betwixt and between, where he'd be looked up to a bit—and it would be something of a sea-faring place, you may be sure. There ain't so many but what you could look in at 'em all, and ask a few questions, and get on the

right track. I can give you the names of two or three of the likeliest."

"I shall be much obliged," said Theodore. "I think it's a capital idea."

The inspector wrote down the names of three taverns, tore the leaf out of his pocket-book, and handed it to Mr. Dalbrook.

"If you don't hear of him at one of those, I doubt if you'll hear of him anywhere on the island," he said. "Those houses are all near the pier and the quays. It won't take you long to go from one to the other. 'The Rose and Crown,' that's where the English pilots go; 'La Belle Alliance,' that's a French house with a *table d'hôte*. They've got a very good name for their brandy, and it's a great place for broken-down gentlemen. You can get a good dinner for half-a-crown with *vin ordinaire* included."

"I'll try the 'Belle Alliance' first," said Theodore. "It sounds likely."

"Yes, I believe it's about the likeliest," replied the inspector.

The "Belle Alliance" fronted the quay, and

stood at the corner of a shabby old street. There was a church close by, and a dingy old churchyard. Everything surrounding the "Belle Alliance" was shabby and faded, and its outlook on the dirty quay and the traffic of ugly waggons and uglier trucks, hogsheads and lumber of all kinds, was depressing in the extreme.

But the tavern itself had an air of smartness which an English tavern would hardly have had in the same circumstances. The interior was gay with much looking-glass, and a good deal of tarnished gilding. There were artificial flowers in sham silver vases on the tables, and there was a semi-circular counter at one end of the restaurant, behind which a ponderous divinity, still youthful, but expansive, sat enthroned, her sleek, black hair elaborately dressed, her forehead ornamented with accroche-cœurs, and a cross of Jersey diamonds sparkling upon her swan-like throat, which was revealed by one of those open collars which are dear to the lower order of French women. There was a row of tables in front of the windows which looked towards the quay, and there was a long,

narrow table in the middle of the room, laid for the *table d'hôte dejeuner*; but as yet the room was empty, save for one young man and woman, of the tourist order, who were whispering and tittering over a *café complet* at one of the small tables furthest from the buffet.

Theodore went straight to the front of the buffet, and saluted the lady enthroned there.

"Madame speaks English, no doubt?"

"Oh, yes, but a leetle. I am live long time in Jairsey, where is more English as French peoples."

After this sample speech it seemed to him that he might get on better with the lady in her native tongue, so he asked her for a cup of coffee in her own language, and stood at the counter while he drank it, and talked to her of indifferent matters, she nothing loth.

"You have lived a long time in Jersey," he said. "Does that mean a long time in this house?"

"Except one year I have lived in this house all the time, nine years. I was only nineteen when I undertook the position of *dame du comptoir*. I

could not have undertaken such a responsibility with a stranger, but the proprietor is my uncle, and he knew how to be indulgent to my youth and inexperience."

"And then, a handsome face is always an attraction. You must have brought him good fortune, madame."

"He is kind enough to say so. He found it difficult to dispense with my services while I was absent, though he had a person from London who had been much admired at the Crystal Palace."

"And you, madame. Was it a feminine caprice, the desire for change, which made you abandon your uncle during that time?"

"I left him when I married," replied the lady, with a profound sigh. "I returned to him a heart-broken widow."

"Pray forgive me for having recalled the memory of your grief. I am a stranger in this place, and I am here on a somewhat delicate mission. My first visit is to this house, because I knew I should find intelligence and sympathy here rather than among my own countrymen. I am fortunate in meeting

with a lady who has occupied an important position at St. Heliers for so long a period. I have strong reasons for wishing to discover the history of a gentleman who came to the Island some years ago —I do not know how many—after having been unfortunate in the world. He was a naval man."

"My poor husband was a naval man," sighed the *dame du comptoir*.

"A pilot, no doubt," thought Theodore.

Theodore's manner, which was even more flattering than his words, had made a favourable impression, and the lady was disposed to be confidential. She glanced at the clock, and was glad to see that it was only twenty minutes past twelve. There was time for a little further conversation with this handsome, well-bred Englishman, before the habitués of the "Belle Alliance" came trooping in for the half-past twelve o'clock *table d'hôte*. Already the atmosphere was odorous with fried sole and *ragout de mouton*.

"The gentleman of whom I am in quest is reported to have died on the Island," he continued; "but this is very likely to have been a false report,

and it is quite possible that Captain Strangway may still——"

"Captain Strangway," echoed the woman, with an agitated air.

"Yes, I see you know all about him. You can help me to find him."

"Know him!" cried the woman. "I should think I did know him, to my bitter cost. Captain Strangway was my husband."

"Good Heavens!"

"He was my husband. The people will be here in a few minutes. If monsieur will do me the honour to step into my sitting-room, we can talk without interruption."

CHAPTER XII.

"The comfort is, you shall be called to no more payments, fear no more tavern bills."

The *dame du comptoir* beckoned a waiter, and delegated some portion of her supreme authority to him for the next quarter of an hour. She constituted as it were a Regency, and gave her subordinate command over her wine and liqueur bottles, her *fine champagne*, Bass and Guinness; and then she ushered Theodore Dalbrook into a very small sitting-room at the back of the counter, so small indeed that a large looking glass, a porcelain stove, two arm chairs, and one little table left hardly standing room.

Theodore followed with a sense of bewilderment. He had told himself that the Island of Jersey was a world so small that he could not have much difficulty in tracing any man who had lived and died

there within the last ten years; but accident had been kinder to him than he had hoped.

The lady seated herself in one of the ruby velvet arm chairs, and motioned him to the other.

"You have given me a shock, monsieur," she said. "My friends in the island know that my marriage was unfortunate, and they never mention my husband. He is forgotten as if he had never been. I sometimes fancy that year of my life was only a troubled dream. Even my name is unchanged. I was called Mdlle. Coralie before I married. I am called Madame Coralie now."

"I am sorry to have caused you painful emotion, madame, but it is most important to me to trace the history of your husband's later years, and I deem myself very fortunate in having found you."

"Is it about a property, a fortune left him, perhaps?" exclaimed Coralie, with sudden animation, her fine eyes lighting up with hope.

"Alas, no. Fortune had nothing in reserve for your unlucky husband."

"Unlucky, indeed, but not so unlucky as I was in giving my heart to him. I knew that he was a

drunkard. I knew that he had been turned out of the navy, and out of the mercantile marine on account of that dreadful vice—but he—he was very fond of me, poor fellow, and he swore that he would never touch a glass of brandy again as long as he lived, if I would consent to marry him. He did turn over a new leaf for a time, and kept himself sober and steady, and would hang over that counter for a whole evening talking to me, and take nothing but black coffee. I thought I could reform him. I thought it would be a grand thing to reform a man like that, a gentleman bred and born, a man whose father had been a great landowner, and whose family name was one of the oldest in England. He was a gentleman in all his ways. He never forgot himself even when he had been drinking. He was a gentleman to the last. Such a fine-looking man too. While he was courting me and kept himself steady he got back his good looks. He looked ten years younger, and I was very proud of him the day we were married. He had taken a house for me, a nice little house on the hill near the Jesuits' College, with a pretty little garden, and I had furnished the house

out of my savings. I had saved a goodish bit since I came to Jersey, for my uncle is a generous man, and my situation here is a good one. I had over two hundred pounds in hand after I paid for the furniture—these chairs were in my drawing-room—and he hadn't much more than the clothes he stood upright in, poor fellow. But I wouldn't have minded that if he had only kept himself steady. I was prepared to work for him. I knew I should have to keep him. He was too much of a gentleman to be able to work except in his profession, and that was gone from him for ever; so I knew it was incumbent on me to work for both, and I thought that by letting our drawing-room floor in the season, and by doing a little millinery all the year round—I'm a good milliner, monsieur—I thought I could manage to keep a comfortable home, without touching my two hundred pounds in the Savings Bank."

"You were a brave, unselfish girl to think so."

"Ah, sir, we are not selfish when we love. I was very fond of him, poor fellow. I had begun with pitying him, and then he was a thoroughbred gentleman—he was *vielle roche*, monsieur, and I have

always admired the noblesse. I am no Republican, moi. And he had such winning ways when he was sober—and he was not stupid as other men are when he was drunk—only more brilliant—*la tête montée —hélas, comme il pétillait d'esprit*—but it was his brain that he was burning—*that* was the fuel that made the light. But how is it you interest yourself in him, monsieur?" she asked, suddenly, fixing him with her sharp black eyes. "You say it is not about property. You must have a motive, all the same."

"I have a motive, but my interest is not personal. I am acting for some one who now owns the Strangway estate, and who wishes to know what has become of the old family."

"What can it matter to any one?" asked Madame Coralie, suspiciously. "They had lost all their money—of the land that had been theirs not an acre was left. What business is it of any one's what became of them when they were driven from their birth-place. Oh, how my poor Frederick hated the race that had possessed itself of his estate. There was nothing too bad for them. When he was ex-

cited he would rave about them awfully—a beggarly lawyer, a black-hearted scoundrel, that is what he would call Lord—Lord Sherrington, when he had been drinking."

Theodore's brow grew thoughtful. How strange this seemed, almost like a confirmation of Juanita's superstitious horror of the banished race. Perhaps it was not unnatural that an unlucky spendthrift—ruined, disgraced—should hate the favourite of fortune who had ousted him; but not with a hate capable of murder, murder in cold blood, the murder of a man who had never injured him even indirectly.

"Your husband has been dead some years, I conclude?" he said, presently.

"Three years and a half on the tenth of last month."

"And you had a troublesome time with him, I fear?"

"Trouble seems a light word for what I went through. It was like living in hell—there is no other word—the hell which a madman can make of all around him. For a few weeks we went on quietly—he seemed contented, and I was very happy,

thinking I had cured him. I watched him as a cat watches a mouse, for fear he should go wrong again. He never went out without me; and at home I did all that a woman can do to make much of the man she loves, studying him in everything, surrounding him with every little luxury I could afford, cooking dainty little meals for him, petting him as if he had been an idolized child. He seemed grateful, for the first few weeks, and almost happy. Then I saw he was beginning to mope a little. He got low-spirited, and would sit over the fire and brood—it was cutting March weather—and would moan over his blighted life, and his own folly. 'If I had to begin over again,' he would say, 'ah, it would be different, Cora, it would be all different.'"

"He was not unkind to you?"

"No, he was never unkind, never. To the last, when he died raving mad with delirium tremens, he was always kind. It was seeing his madness and his ruin that made my trouble. He was violent sometimes, and threatened to kill me, but that was only when he didn't know me. I watched him moping for a week or so, and then one day, I was

so unhappy at seeing him fret, that I thought I would do anything to cheer him. I fancied he missed the company in this house, and the cards and dominoes, and billiards—for before we were married he used to dine at the *table d'hôte* two or three times a week, and used to be in the *café* or in the billiard room every night."

"How did he manage to live without a profession, and without ostensible means?"

Madame shrugged her shoulders.

"God knows. I think he used to write to his old friends—his brother officers in the navy or the merchant service—and he got a little from one and a little from another. He would borrow of any one. And there was a small legacy from his mother's sister which fell in to him soon after he came to Jersey. That was all gone before I married him. He hadn't a penny after he'd paid the marriage fees. Well, monsieur, seeing him so down-hearted I proposed that he should go down to the 'Belle Alliance' and have a game at billiards and see his old friends. 'You needn't take any money,' I said, 'my uncle will treat you hospitably.' He seemed pleased at

the idea, and he promised to be home early; but just as he was leaving the house he turned back and said there was a little bill of thirty shillings he owed to a bootmaker in the street round the corner, and he didn't like to pass the man's shop without paying. Would I let him have the money? It was the first money he'd asked me for since we were married, and I hadn't the heart to say no, so I went to my little cash-box and took out three half sovereigns. I told him that the money meant a week's housekeeping. 'I give you nice little dinners, don't I, Fred?' I said, 'but you've no idea how economical I am.' He laughed and kissed me, and said he hated economy, and wished he had a fortune for my sake, and he went down the street whistling. Well, sir, perhaps you can guess what happened. He came home at three o'clock next morning mad with drink, and then I knew he was not to be cured. I went on trying all the same, though, till the last; and I lived the life of a soul in torment. I was fond of him to the last, and saw him killing himself inch by inch, and saw him die a dreadful death, one year and three days after our

wedding day. He spent every penny I had in the world, and my uncle helped us when that was gone, and I came back to this house after his funeral a broken-hearted woman. All my furniture which I'd worked for was sold to pay the rent, and the doctors, and the undertaker. I just saved the furniture in this room, and that is all that is left of four hundred and seventy pounds and of my married life."

"You were indeed the victim of a generous and confiding heart."

"I was fond of him to the last, monsieur, and I forgave him all my sufferings; but let no woman ever marry a drunkard with the hope of reforming him."

"Were you quite alone in your martyrdom; had your husband no relatives left to help him on his dying bed?"

"Not one. He told me he was the last of his race. He must have had distant relations, I suppose; but his elder brother was dead, and his sister."

"You are sure his brother was dead?"

"Yes; he fell into the water at Nice on a dark evening, when he was going on board the steamer for Corsica. I have got the paper with the account of his death."

"Will you show me that paper, and any other documents relating to your husband's family? I know I have no right to ask such a favour; but all I can say is that I shall be very grateful if you will so far oblige me."

The *table d'hôte* was in full swing in the adjoining room, as testified by the clattering of plates and the jingle of knives and forks, and a subdued murmur as of a good many confidential conversations carried on simultaneously.

"You want to see my poor Fred's private papers," said the widow, meditatively. "That's a good deal to ask; not that there are any secrets in them that can hurt anybody above ground. The Colonel is dead, and his sister. My husband was the last. But I can't understand why anybody should want to pry into a dead man's papers, unless there's property hanging to them."

She looked at Theodore suspiciously, as if she

could not divest herself of the idea of a fortune having turned up somehow, unexpectedly; a fortune to which her dead husband was entitled.

"There is no property, I assure you. It is a question of sentiment, not of money."

"You're a lawyer, I suppose?" said Coralie, still suspiciously.

She supposed that it was only lawyers who went about prying into the affairs of the dead.

"I am a lawyer; but the business which brings me to Jersey is not law business."

"Well, I don't see how any harm can come to me through your seeing my husband's papers. There's not many to see—a few letters from the Colonel, and two or three from a lawyer about the legacy, and a dozen or so from old friends, refusing or sending him money. You've spoken kindly to me, and I've felt that you could sympathize with me, though you're a stranger—so—well—you may see his letters, though it hurts me to touch anything that belonged to him, *le pauvre homme*."

She took a bunch of keys from her pocket, unlocked the little secretaire, and from one of the

drawers produced a bundle of old letters and cuttings from newspapers, which she handed to Theodore Dalbrook, and then seated herself opposite to him, planted her elbows on the table, and watched him while he read, keenly on the alert for any revelation of his purpose which might escape him in the course of his reading. She had not altogether relinquished that idea of an inheritance, or legacy—property of some kind—involved in this endeavour to trace a dead man's history. The explanation which Theodore had given had not convinced her. He had confessed himself a lawyer, and that was in itself enough to make her doubt him.

The cuttings from old newspapers belonged to the days when Frederick Strangway had commanded a war ship, to the days when he fought in the Chinese war. Some of them recorded the honour he had won for himself at different stages of his career, and it was only natural that these should have been carefully preserved by him in all his wanderings. But there were other cuttings—the report of the court martial that broke him—the trial in which he stood accused of having risked the loss of his ship

with all hands aboard by his dissolute habits—a shameful and a painful story. This record of his folly had been kept by that strange perversity of the human mind which makes a man secrete and treasure documents which must wring his heart and bow his head with shame every time he looks at them. There were other extracts of a like shameful kind —reports of street rows, two cases of drunken assault in San Francisco, one of a fight in Sydney harbour. He had kept them all as if they had been words of praise and honour.

The letters were most of them trivial—letters from brother officers of the past—"very sorry to hear of your embarrassments," "regret inability to do more than the enclosed small cheque," "the numerous claims upon my purse render it impossible for me to grant the loan requested," the usual variations upon the old tune in which a heavily-taxed *pater familias* fences with the appeal of an unlucky acquaintance. They were such letters as are left by the portmanteau full among the effects of the man for whom the world has been too hard.

Theodore put aside all this correspondence after a

brief glance, and there remained only four letters in the same strong, resolute hand—the hand of Reginald Strangway.

The first in date was written on Army and Navy Club paper, and was addressed to Captain Strangway, R.N., H.M.S. *Cobra*, Hong Kong.

"My dear Fred,

"I have been sorry to leave your letter so long unanswered, but I am bothered about a great many things. My wife has been out of health for nearly a year. The doctors fear her chest is affected, and tell me I ought to get her away from England before the winter. As things have been going very badly with me for a long time I shall not be sorry to cut this beastly town, where the men who have made their money, God knows how, are now upon the crest of the wave, and by their reckless expenditure have made it impossible for a man of small means to live in London—if he wants to live like a gentleman. Everything is twice as dear as it used to be when I was a subaltern. My wife and I are pigging in two rooms on a second

floor in Jermyn Street. I live at my club, and she lives on her relatives, so that we don't often have to sit down to a lodging-house dinner of burnt soles and greasy chops; but the whole business is wretched. She has to go to parties in a four-wheel cab, and I can hardly afford the risk of a rubber. So I shall be uncommonly glad to cut it all, and settle in some out-of-the-way place where we can live cheap, and where the climate will suit Millicent.

"My first idea was Algiers, but things are still rather unsettled there, as you know. Lambton, of the Guards, has been shooting in Corsica lately, and came home with a glowing account of the climate and the cheapness of the inns, which are roughish, but clean and fairly comfortable; so I have determined on Corsica. We shall be within a day's sail of Nice, so not utterly out of reach of civilisation, and we can live there how we like, without entertaining a mortal, or having to buy new clothes. Millicent, who is fond of novelty, is in love with the notion, and Dangerfield has behaved very well to her, promising her an extra hundred a

year if we will live quietly and keep out of debt, which, considering he is as poor as Job, is not so bad. As for my creditors, they are pretty quiet since I got Aunt Belle's legacy, part of which I divided among 'em as a sop to Cerberus. They'll have to be still quieter when I'm settled in Corsica.

"Of course, you heard of that wretched woman's kicking over the traces altogether at last. God knows what will become of her. I believe she had been carrying on rather badly for some time before Tom found out anything. You know what an ass he is. However, he got hold of a letter one evening—met the postman at the door and took her letters along with his own, and didn't like the look of one and opened it; and then there was an infernal row, and she just put on her bonnet and shawl, walked out of the house and called a cab and drove off. He followed in another cab, but it was a foggy night, and he lost her before she'd gone far. They were in lodgings in Essex Street, and it isn't easy for one cab to chase another on a foggy evening. She never went back to him, and he went all over London denouncing her, naming first

one man and then another, but without any definite idea as to who the real man was. The letter was only a couple of sentences in Italian, which Tom only knew by sight—but he could see it was an appointment at a theatre, for the theatre and hour were named. She snatched the letter out of his hand while they were quarrelling, he told me, and chucked it into the fire, so he hasn't even the man's handwriting as evidence against him. It was a hand he had never seen before, he says. However, if he wants to find her no doubt he can do so, if he takes the trouble. I am sorry she should disgrace her family, and of course my wife feels the scandal uncommonly hard upon *her*. I can't say that I feel any pity for Tom Darcy. She had led a wretched life with him ever since he sold out, and I don't much wonder at her being deuced glad to leave him. As it's Tom business to shoot her lover, and not mine, I shan't mix myself up in the affair—and as for her, well, she has made her bed——!"

There was more in the letter, but the rest was of no interest to Theodore.

The letter was dated January 3rd, 1851.

Three of the remaining letters were from Corsica, and contained nothing of any significance. A fourth was written at Monte Carlo, in answer to an appeal for money, and the date was twelve years later than the first. It was a gloomy letter, the letter of a ruined man, who had drunk the cup of disappointment to the dregs.

"To ask me for help seems like a ghastly joke on your part. Whatever your troubles may be, I fancy my lookout is darker than yours. My wife and I have vegetated on that accursed island for just a dozen years—it seems like a lifetime to look back upon. We just had enough to live upon while my father was alive, for, bad as things were at Cheriton, he contrived to send me something. Now that he is gone, and the estate has been sold by the mortgagees, there is nothing left for me —and we have been living for the last two years upon the pittance my poor Milly gets from her father. Whatever your cares may be, you don't know what it is to have a sick wife whose condition requires every luxury and indulgence, and to have

barely enough for bread and cheese. If you were to see the house we live in—the tiled floors and the dilapidated furniture—and the windows that won't shut—and the shutters that won't keep to, and our two Corsican servants who look like a brace of savages, though they are good creatures in the main—you would be the last man to howl about your own troubles to me.

"I have been here a month, and with my usual diabolical luck. I am going home to-morrow—though perhaps I should be wiser if I went up into the hills behind Monaco and put a bullet through my brains. Millicent would be no worse off, God help her; for she is entirely dependent on her father, and I am only an incubus—but she might think herself worse off, poor soul, so I suppose I had better go home.

"What am I thinking about? I can't afford to take refuge in the suicide's haven. My life is insured in the Imperial for £3,000, and poor old Dangerfield has been paying the premium ever since I began to go to the bad financially. It would be too hard upon him if I shot myself."

This was the last letter, and it was endorsed by the brother's hand.

"Reginald's last letter. I read in the *Times* newspaper of his being drowned at Nice ten days afterwards."

Theodore made a note of the dates of these letters, and the name of the insurance office. Provided with these data it would be easy for him to verify the fact of Colonel Strangway's death, and thus bring the history of the two sons of old Squire Strangway to its dismal close in dust and darkness.

And thus would be answered Juanita's strange suspicion of the house of Strangway, answered with an unanswerable answer. Who can argue with Death? Is not that at least the end of all things—the road that leads no whither?

There remained for him only the task of tracing the erring daughter to her last resting-place. This would doubtless be more difficult, as a runaway wife living under a false name, and in all probability going from place to place, was likely to

have left but faint and uncertain indications of her existence. But the first part of his task had been almost too easy. He felt that he could take no credit for what he had done, could expect no gratitude from Juanita.

He thanked Mrs. Strangway—*alias* Madame Coralie—for her politeness, and asked to be allowed to offer her a ten-pound note as a trifling acknowledgment of the favour she had done him. She promptly accepted this offering, and was only the more convinced that there was "property" involved in the lawyer's researches.

"If there is anything to come to *me* from any of his relations, I hope nobody will try to keep me out of it," she said. "I hope his friends will remember that I gave him my last shilling, and nursed him when there wasn't many would have stayed in the room with him?"

Theodore reiterated his assurance that no question of money or inheritance was involved in his mission to the Island, and then bade the Captain's widow a respectful adieu, and threaded his way through the avenue of tables to the door, and out of

the garlic-charged atmosphere into the fresh autumnal air.

He stayed one night in Jersey, and left at eleven o'clock the next morning on board the *Fanny*, and slept in his chambers in Ferret Court, after having written a long letter to Juanita with a full account of all that he had learnt from the lips of the widow, and from the letters of the dead.

"I do not surrender my hope of finding the murderer," he wrote finally, "but you must now agree with me that I must look elsewhere than among the remnants of the Strangway race. They can prove an unanswerable *alibi*—the grave."

He went to the office of the Imperial next morning, saw the secretary, and ascertained that the amount of the policy upon Colonel Strangway's life had been paid to Lady Millicent Strangway, his widow, in April, 1863, after the directors had received indisputable evidence of his death.

"I remember the case perfectly," said the secretary. "The circumstances were peculiar, and there was a suspicion of suicide, as the man had just left

Monte Carlo, and was known to have lost his last napoleon, after a most extraordinary run of luck. There was some idea of disputing the claim; but if he did make away with himself he had contrived to do it so cleverly that it would have been uncommonly difficult to prove that his death was not an accident—more particularly as Lord Dangerfield brought an action against the steamboat company for wilful negligence in regard to their gangway and deficient lighting. The policy was an old one, too, and so it was decided not to litigate."

"There could be no doubt as to the identity of the man who was drowned at Nice, I conclude?"

"No, the question of identity was carefully gone into. Lord Dangerfield happened to be wintering at Cannes that year, and he heard of his son-in-law's death in time to go over and identify the body before it was coffined. You know how quickly burial follows death in that part of the world, and there would have been no possibility of the widow getting over from Ajaccio before the funeral. We had Lord Dangerfield's declaration that the body he saw

at Nice was the body of Colonel Strangway, and we paid the £3,000 on that evidence. We have never had any reason to suspect error or foul play."

END OF VOL. I.

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